SHORT STORIES

THE GREAT HOME STORY PAPER.

TARTAN COVER No. 5.—MACMILLAN.

No. 721.] Week ending October 25th, 1902. [One Penny.

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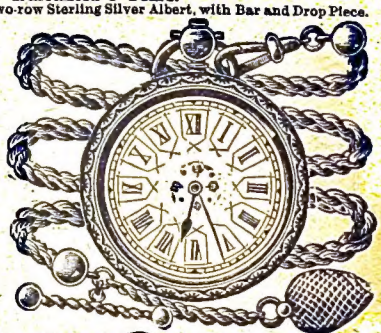

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Short Stories.

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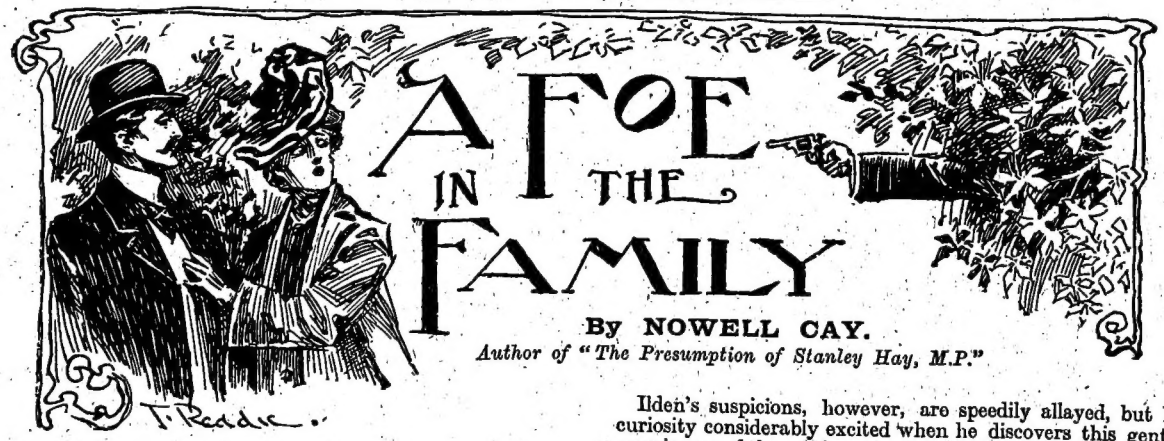

Five Abortive Attempts on a Peer's Life.

While returning one evening to Pennybrook Hall, the residence of his uncle Jasper, Lord Ilden discovers a young girl in great distress at having lost two five pound notes, the whole of her wages for six months as a country governess. Together they search for the missing money; but as it is getting dusk, and Lord Ilden wants to get rid of his pretty companion, who turns out to be the sister of one of his old college chums, he manages to substitute two of his own notes and return them to her. She goes away overflowing with gratitude.

When she disappeared, however, Lord Ilden continued the search. He failed to find the money, but instead discovered an envelope addressed to himself, the contents of which he had never seen. The envelope, addressed in a girl's handwriting, is postmarked "Lallerton." Pocketing his find, Lord Ilden is lighting a cigarette, when the report of a rifle suddenly breaks the stillness of the evening, and a bullet whizzes just past him and buries itself in a tree behind.

"That," mutters Lord Ilden, "is the third attempt which has been made on my life during my stay at Pennybrook Hall."

On his return to his uncle's, he tells his cousin, Catherine Hay, of his adventure, and, feeling assured that the attempts are being made by some member of the family, many of whom would profit considerably by his death, proposes marriage to her as a means of reducing the value of his own death to his enemies. Cathie, however, refuses.

Meanwhile Lord Ilden has discovered that it is his cousin Percival who opened the post-bag and extracted the letter addressed to himself, the envelope of which he found in the coppice.

That same evening Lord Ilden's valet discovers a large quantity of poison in his master's flask. This makes the fourth attempt.

Upon receiving the news, Lord Ilden considers it wisest to leave Pennybrook Hall at once. He is driving to the station with Cathie when they overtake a man who appears to take a great interest in them. Ilden's suspicions are instantly aroused, especially so as the man takes a short cut across the fields, and is waiting at the station when they arrive.

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Ilden's suspicions, however, are speedily allayed, but his curiosity considerably excited when he discovers this gentleman in one of the carriages in the train he is about to enter, in animated conversation with Florence Courthorpe, the lady of the bank notes. At Witterly station Florence is met by Mrs. Morgan Wright, her new employer. Lord Ilden alights at the next station and wanders along the main road, looking for a quiet inn where he could stay for a time. All unconsciously he walks back towards Witterly and settles down at the "Black Bull," exactly opposite Florence's new home. Florence, however, sees him, and that same night, after all in the house had gone to bed, sits at her window gazing abstractedly across the street. Suddenly a man in a slouch hat is silhouetted against Ilden's bedroom window. He carries a revolver—his purpose being easily discernible. Fortunately Ilden is not in his room, and, taking advantage of the few minutes' grace thus allowed, Florence slips on a dressing gown, quietly leaves her room and the house, and runs across to the "Black Bull" to give the alarm. But the would-be murderer has escaped. Florence then returns to her house, only, however, to meet her scandalised employer on the stairs.

Thus a fifth attempt has been made on Lord Ilden's life.

(*The above is a short summary of the opening chapters.*)

Cast Adrift for Ilden's Sake.

Lord Ilden was becoming serious. The unmistakable plot against his life showed itself as more and more formidable. He had complacently imagined that a trifling artifice would put him out of the power of pursuit, and allow him to live in perfect security so long as he was willing to remain in exile. His only uneasiness had been that by remaining in exile he lessened his chances of discovering his opponent, and he had taken precautions to avoid being followed half-heartedly, as something not really called for. And now his precautions had shown themselves not only called for but insufficient. The speed with which he had been followed and his life threatened robbed him of a certain contempt he had felt for the cunning pitted against his own, and it changed the position very considerably. He had imagined the struggle one from which he could retire whenever he pleased, so long as he remained hidden and passive, but it had become a struggle from

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which he could not know a moment's escape until it ended one way or the other.

To-night it forbade him to sleep. He had examined his bedroom and its approaches critically. The windows had no fastenings, while a sloping roof beneath it made access as easy as the least athletic of would-be assassins could desire. Ilden decided that it would be the height of imprudence to close his eyes in such a place after his warning, and intolerant as he felt of the necessity he sat up all night by the window on the watch.

He could not remain at Witterby. That was apparent. Apart from the sense of insecurity at night, he would not be able to take a single stroll without expecting a bullet from behind the hedge. And when he changed his whereabouts he would no longer feel secure. He must think out some new plan, and he gave the night to planning.

Not that any brilliant plan suggested itself. It was true that he could, if he chose, enlist the aid of the police, but the idea did not appeal to him. He had no great faith in their ability to protect him or to discover his enemy. The long list of political assassinations tended to show how little their protection was worth, and their investigations would almost inevitably mean publicity, a thing he was determined to avoid at all costs. The deeply-rooted impression that his danger was due, directly or indirectly, to some member of his father's family, had made him from the first determined to keep the whole matter so far as possible in his own hands. Without having a very high regard for any of the individuals who shared his name, he had a very tender regard for the name itself, and he had no mind to see it in the papers in connection with a disgraceful plot.

The welcome arrival of dawn found him with no practical resolve except that of leaving Witterby at the earliest possible moment. But with morning the possibility of evading pursuit had assumed a more cheerful aspect. It was true that he had been traced once, but he had given the pursuer too many opportunities. In sending for his bag to the next station he had completed the clue for anyone who might have seen him leave the train there. In future he would remember that he had a person of some little astuteness to cope with.

At the first sound of anybody stirring below he ran down, glad to think that a new day had begun, and breakfasted in good time to catch the first train that left for Rickerby.

The landlord of the Black Bull drove him down in person, and by calling him "my lord" with every word showed that Florence's question of the previous night had not been lost upon him. He was so concerned for "his lordship's" safety, and so curious about the danger which threatened him that Ilden was glad to get rid of him.

It was barely seven yet and the train was not due till a quarter past, and the young man was irked by the waiting.

He was alone on the platform, and in spite of his steady nerves, a sense of the danger surrounding him insisted on holding his mind. He felt nervous of the empty waiting-rooms, in any one of which an assassin might be waiting revolver in hand, and he turned back to the booking-office where he could scarcely be taken unawares. He found himself watching the doorway with an intensity which annoyed him, although he could not control it, as footsteps approached from the road. They belonged to the porter who had given him Mrs. Morgan Wright's name and address, coming to begin his day's work. Then a vehicle stopped, and Ilden's eyes turned once more to the doorway. A groom was bringing in luggage, and he turned to the ticket office which had just opened. He booked to Ilden Market as a precaution against inquiries that might be made there later.

Then as he turned to watch the doorway again, his face filled with a surprise in which was something both of pleasure and dismay. For following her luggage which the doctor's groom had deposited unceremoniously on the floor, was its owner, Florence Courthorpe.

She had already seen him, and made some effort to control the rush of emotion which had brought all the blood involuntarily to her cheeks.

She managed to smile almost with composure as he hastened forward with outstretched hand.

"This is a pleasure I did not anticipate," he said. "But you are not leaving Witterby? You only came yesterday."

Her face crimsoned again at the question.

"Yes, my engagement at Minerva House has ceased," she said with attempted indifference. "Mrs. Wright has discovered that I shall not make a suitable governess for her children."

Ilden's face grew anxious and disturbed.

"Not on account of what happened last night, I hope?"

Florence hesitated.

"I am sure that Mrs. Wright was prejudiced against me before that."

"But the affair of last night led to your dismissal?" he insisted.

The girl nodded.

"But you must really not blame yourself," she added quickly, as she saw how disturbed he was. "I am sure that I should not have been happy there."

"Tell me what happened," he said, ignoring the palliative, and the sternness of his tone frightened her a little, even while it thrilled her with a sense of sympathetic championship. She no longer tried to evade his questioning.

"She met me as I returned and would not believe me when I told her what had happened. She spoke very cruelly, and insisted that I should leave the house the first thing in the morning. I never guessed that you would be leaving by the same train." For her it had been another of the wonderful coincidences.

"But this is intolerable," he interrupted hotly. "To be insulted like this for performing a simple act of humanity! Why did you not let me know? I will come back with you to the house at once and insist on this woman offering you an apology and reinstating you."

The girl's expressive face showed how disturbed she was by the suggestion.

"It would only make it worse," she cried quickly. "She would believe nothing that you said, and I could never go back there after the way in which she has spoken."

Her distressed earnestness impressed him.

"I can quite understand *that*," he said gravely. "I should not like to think of your going back. Such women are best avoided; but I shall write to this Dr. Wright and give him a proper sense of his wife's injustice. I wish that I had known—I should not have left you last night to give your explanation alone. But where are you going now?"

A sudden sense of responsibility weighed upon him, as something burdensome but not by any possibility to be avoided after what had happened. He must interest himself in Miss Courthorpe's future—no longer as a voluntary acknowledgment of his regard for her brother, but as a duty demanded by simple justice.

Intuitively, no doubt, she read something of what was passing in his mind, and answered with forced cheerfulness.

"For the present I am going to stay with a friend—an old schoolfellow, at Lallerton, near Shipton Gate. You know the village?"

His surprise at the coincidence had shown itself involuntarily in his face.

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"I have never been there," he said; "but the neglect is soon to be remedied. For, strangely enough, it is my destination this morning. We shall fortunately be able to travel together."

Politeness demanded the speech, but Ilden was inclined to doubt whether the circumstance *was* fortunate. It was always more easy to trace two than one, and the fact emphasised itself when he took a ticket for her to Shipton Gate.

But the claims of courtesy were paramount with him, and his manner gave her no hint that the coincidence was anything but pleasing. Florence's pleasure was undiluted, and could not hide itself.

The thought of his mysterious danger, never actually out of her mind, only made the meeting more providential. She had been conscious of a vague yearning to watch over him and avert danger, as she had averted it on the previous night; and an emotion of tender, womanly protectiveness was satisfied for the present, when she knew that on the journey at least she would be with him. Her attention was already on the alert, as they walked out on the quiet platform together.

The train was just coming in, and there was little opportunity of speaking until they were seated in it together.

Florence drew a breath of relief.

"We are sure, at least, that nobody has followed you from here," she said, as the train started again without taking up any other passengers than themselves.

The words sounded like an echo of his own thoughts and surprised him. He had not expected her to understand his anxiety so intimately.

"No, but they may be in the train already," he said.

"That is what I feared. He might guess that you would leave by the first train and enter it at the station before this. But I think I noticed everybody as the train came in, and I certainly saw nobody wearing a slouch hat. It is certainly the only thing I noticed about the man last night."

Ilden became less conscious of the disadvantage of having a companion. It was pleasant to be able to compare notes and plans with her. She might indeed be of service to him if she seconded his vigilance in this manner. He pleased her by saying so.

"If I could only help you," she said, her eyes glowing, "but I know so little about you. Have you no idea who it is that is trying to kill you? Can anybody have any motive for wishing you dead?"

It was the question which Catherine Hay had asked him, but Ilden had no thought of answering it so explicitly this time.

"I am quite in the dark," he said; "that is what handicaps me. But before we talk about my enemy, I want you to tell me about yourself. Have you no relatives living?"

"None at all. My father and mother were both only children, and my father's death left me absolutely alone in the world."

"But you had friends?"

"Practically only one—the friend to whom I am going to-day. We lived a very secluded life after my brother's death and adversity showed me that those I had counted friends were only acquaintances. But Miss Despard, my friend at Lallerton, is a very true one. We were at school together, and I stayed with her after my father's death. She would have had me stay with her altogether. But I could not do that. She is not rich. She and her brother share a small annuity and live together in an idyllic little cottage. I travelled part of the way to Witterby with Mr. Despard yesterday."

"The gentleman who got in at Pennybrook with you?" asked Ilden, and smiled at a past suspicion when she answered in the affirmative.

"And you will remain with your friend until you obtain another post as governess?" he asked, and her face fell a little. But she answered with assumed brightness:

"I shall probably have to exert my talents in some new direction; Mrs. Wright will not recommend me as a governess, and she is writing to Mrs. Haydon."

Ilden nodded rather gravely. He was thinking that even the Marchioness would prefer the written testimonials of her former patrons to his personal recommendation.

But he had learnt all that he wanted to know before writing to her and enlisting her sympathy on the girl's behalf, and he returned to his own affairs.

"You say that you have stayed at Lallerton," he remarked. "Have

"They have all gone away, and Mr. Despard told me nothing," cried Florence in dismay.

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you met anybody there who knew or was interested in me in any way?"

Florence shook her head.

"No. Have you friends there?"

"That is what I am going to try and ascertain," said Ilden with his characteristic smile, and drew out an envelope.

"I suppose you do not happen to recognise this handwriting?"

Florence examined it carefully and looked up with surprise in her eyes.

"Why, it is Miss Despard's! Then you know her?"

Ilden was as surprised as she, although his face did not show it so clearly.

"Are you quite sure?" he asked sceptically.

"I only know that it is exactly like her writing. Was it she who wrote it?"

"That is what I have to find out. Do you know of any reason why your friend should write to me? Has she ever mentioned my name to you?"

"Never."

"Then I think that the similarity of the handwriting is probably a coincidence," said Ilden, "but you make me curious to see your friend, if I may, when we reach Lallerton."

The train was slackening speed at Rickerby as he spoke, and all their attention became engaged again in the attempt to detect any sign of pursuit.

There was nothing, however, to rouse their suspicion. Of the few other passengers in the early train only two left it at the junction beside themselves, an old countrywoman obviously beyond suspicion, and a workman who left the station at once without displaying the least interest in them.

As they changed over to the other train, the scene brought back a remembrance of the previous day, and it gave direction to his questioning when they had resumed their journey again.

"Your friend, Mr. Despard, was on his way home to Lallerton, I suppose, when I saw him travelling with you yesterday?"

Florence nodded.

"And had he been to Pennybrook to see *you?*" he asked, and her violet eyes lifted themselves in quick surprise.

"To see me? Oh, no. I was very much surprised to see him at Pennybrook station. And I was very pleased, too, because I was wanting to know whether anything had happened to Daisy. For more than two months she has not answered my letters. If it had not been for my meeting with her brother, I should have been feeling a little nervous to-day, wondering whether my friend had left home or become estranged from me in some way. Mr. Despard put my mind quite at rest. It is only that his sister is absorbed in a new picture she is painting. I am sure that she will be glad to see me."

Her voice had a touch of anxiety, despite the words.

"And suppose that she could not for any reason give you a home?" asked Ilden, impelled to anticipate the fullest possibility of his responsibility. He regretted the question when he saw the shadow of hopelessness that crossed her face.

But she forced it back with a smile. Somehow it seemed easy to be brave this morning.

"I really do not know," she said with a nervous little laugh, and Ilden's face grew graver as he changed the subject.

"And you do not know what took Mr. Despard to Pennybrook? I ask," he added, noticing the incipient surprise on her expressive face, "because I had an idea, when I saw him, that he might have gone on my account. I have to suspect everybody." And he told what had passed on his way to Pennybrook station.

"Oh! that is just like him," she said. "He is the most absent-minded of men, and is always falling into fits of abstraction in which he forgets everything. He had no doubt forgotten that he had a train to catch until the passing of your wagonette reminded him of the fact. I found him very abstracted myself, and I did not like to ask him what had brought him to Pennybrook when he did not volunteer the information. He is a very curious and melancholy sort of a man, as different as one could imagine from his sister, but they are very deeply attached to one another. In fact I almost think that it would break Guy Despard's heart if Daisy married and left him. He is even jealous of her affection for *me*."

"That is unfortunate, since you say she is your only friend," said Ilden. "And is Miss Despard equally opposed to the idea of her brother marrying?"

Her quick glance made him colour slightly with the feeling that he had been detected in an unjustifiable inquisitiveness. He was conscious that he had been wondering what the chances were of this Guy Despard solving his companion's difficulties by making her his wife. The idea did not please him. He had taken a prejudice against the tall, lean man, with his hooked features and moody eyes, and little as he had welcomed the responsibility thrown on his shoulders, he did not wish to find his help made quite unnecessary by another man.

Her answer did not reassure him.

"Oh, no! Daisy is quite different," she said. "There is no jealousy in her affection. But I do not think Mr. Despard will ever marry. He is over thirty now, and he is a very curious man. But you will probably see him for yourself within the hour. For here we are at Shipton Gate."

They left the little station apparently as free from any sign of pursuit as ever, driving in an old-fashioned fly that carried Ilden's bag as well as Florence's luggage. This time the Gladstone should not serve as a clue to any possible pursuer. The fly should leave it at the hotel where he would put up after seeing Miss Courthorpe to her destination and interviewing her friend.

The chance that Miss Despard would turn out to be his unknown correspondent seemed to him unlikely. His companion must have been misled by a resemblance in the handwriting. Such remarkable coincidences only occur in stories. But still it was strange that the postmark of the mysterious envelope had shown it to come from Lallerton. Possibly it *had* been written by Miss Despard, but had contained a letter only on some trivial matter. She was an artist. Perhaps she wanted permission to paint Ilden Castle. He smiled at the importance his fancy had given the communication, and was glad to remember that he had at least a slight justification. The lost letter was evidently one which somebody had thought it worth while to intercept.

The thoughts kept him silent as the rattling fly took them down a steep, winding road into the pretty valley of Lallerton.

Florence, too, was silent. Now that her anxiety on her companion's behalf was put to rest for the time being by the fact that nobody had left the train beside themselves at Shipton Gate, she had time to let her mind dwell on her own position.

If her one friend failed her, it seemed to her tragically hopeless, and the dependence she was placing on Daisy Despard's help filled her with a feverish anxiety for the meeting which would assure her that she was not counting on it in vain. She had no reason for doubting it.

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In spite of her friend's silence, Guy Despard had assured her that his sister's feelings for her remained unchanged—and yet—when so much depended upon it, she could not dismiss her uneasy fears.

Her impatience increased as the fly, rolling across a picturesque stone bridge over a babbling stream, entered the approaches of Lallerton village. They were passing the forge now, musical with the fight between glowing iron and human muscle.

In the distance the square tower of a church showed itself above the trees, and the next turn brought them in sight of the village green, a picture of lazy peace in the morning sunlight.

"Chez-nous," as the Despards had called their pretty, rose-covered cottage, lay at the other side behind a thick-grown privet hedge which shut it out from the road.

Florence's impatience increased visibly as they approached the wooden gate, and Ilden was very conscious that some at least of the puzzling questions in her mind were likely to be answered within the next few minutes. Before he could assist her, Florence had alighted while the fly was still moving.

"I will see whether Daisy is at home," she said, her voice trembling a little, and it was not until a minute or two had passed that he decided to go down and follow her.

As he swung open the gate the first sight of the cottage with its shuttered windows told him that the place was deserted. He was prepared to find Florence with a face full of hopeless dismay pulling in a vain hope at the bell, which only sounded a hollow answer from an evidently empty house.

He was afraid that she was about to burst into tears as she turned to him with the dismaying truth.

"They have gone away, and Mr. Despard told me nothing."

A Message in the Pathway.

"What can I do?" cried Florence Courthorpe, her lips trembling, as they stood together in the porch of the deserted cottage; and the complete dependence upon him which showed itself unconsciously in her appeal, made Ilden realise that his responsibility had assumed a new shape.

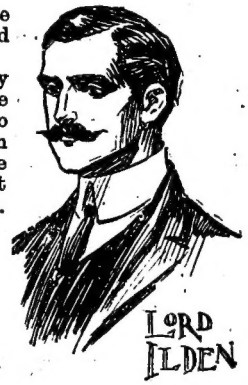
But the thought was not unwelcome. The expectation of a few minutes earlier, that he was about to hand his charge over to the care of this Despard and his sister, and resign his claim to any immediate interest in her welfare, had pleased him so little that he was conscious of some relief even when he found that, for a little while longer at least, Florence was left entirely to his care.

The charge had shown itself, so far, much less burdensome, and much more agreeable, than he had anticipated. He had found Miss Courthorpe very different in her complete absence of self-consciousness from the women to whom he was accustomed, and of whom he had always been a little afraid.

And it had been pleasant to find an ally in his plans who understood and sympathised so completely with his efforts to escape the pursuit of his unknown enemy. It had been as easy and natural to confide in her as in Catherine Hay; and, much as he liked his cousin, he was conscious of an additional attraction in the new ally. Her beauty charmed him. It had been a pleasure to watch the subtle changes that passed over her delicate face as she talked. It was a pleasure to watch it now, although she was almost in tears. The tiny, trembling lip filled him with a vague tenderness, which he did not try to analyse, but which made him welcome the chance that had placed her in his charge.

The picture of her, as she had appeared to him in the inn, with flowing hair, and little, slippered feet beneath her dressing-gown, recurred to him, as it had done a hundred times in the night. She had looked so child-like in her fear that he had felt an impulse to take her up in his arms and soothe her with a kiss, as he would have soothed a child.

He was conscious of the same impulse now, but he only smiled cheerfully.



"What can we do? Well, for my part I am very hungry, so the first thing is to get something to eat if we can manage it at the inn across the green. After which we can make inquiries and find out where your friends have gone. They must surely have decided to move very quickly if Mr. Despard told you nothing about it yesterday."

"That is what makes it so strange," she said anxiously. "They must have left Lallerton when I saw Mr. Despard. See, there are cobwebs across the door already. He does not wish me to know where Daisy is, and she is the only friend I have in the world. What shall I do if I cannot find her?"

"I have no doubt that we shall find out very easily where she has gone when we begin to make inquiries," said Ilden cheerfully, "and you must not speak of her as your only friend. I should like you to look upon me as one."

She looked up gratefully with the tears in her eyes.

"You are very kind. I do not know what I should have done if you had not been here to advise me."

Then a smile burst like sunlight through the cloud on her face.

"I suppose I should have sat down on the step to have a good cry," she added.

"Whereas you simply realise that you are my guest instead of Mr. Despard's. Wipe your eyes and drive on to the inn to lunch with me while we consider the next step. We can evidently learn nothing more from these shuttered windows."

"But my luggage?" she said dubiously, as they turned back to the waiting fly.

"Oh, that can come to the inn too, until we decide what the next step is to be."

She did not answer, but her pretty brows remained dubious and anxious.

"I do not know what I ought to do?" she said after a long pause. "I cannot think."

"Then you must let me think for you," he said cheerfully, although his own thoughts were serious enough.

In his heart he had very little hope of her finding a home with the Despards. The fact that the brother had given her no hint of his sister's departure from Lallerton was significant, as was also his sister's previous silence. Despard had seemed a little mad to him. If, as Florence suggested, his madness took the form of jealousy of his sister's friends, he had probably managed to force or persuade her to abandon her friendship with the governess. In either case, his charge could scarcely hope to find a home with them, even when their address was discovered.

And putting aside the thought of Florence joining her friends, her position was indeed a gloomy one. She was a governess without references, the latter disadvantage due in a great measure to himself. And the worst of it was that any help he gave her only threatened to increase the prejudice against her which her late employer had conceived. Mrs. Wright's attitude had enabled him to realise very clearly how much more necessary circumspection is on the part of a governess—than, say, of a hereditary baron.

He was already feeling doubtful of the success of his meditated appeal to his aunt. Yesterday he had felt more than hopeful. The Marchioness' interest could be depended upon for the sister of a dead friend of his who had fallen upon evil days, with whom personally he was practically unacquainted, a young lady who had accepted bravely

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the drudgery of governess-work, and could produce credentials from her employer. It was just the "case" which would have appealed to the good lady and set her exerting herself until she had obtained for Miss Courthorpe some comfortable post, either as companion to one of her aristocratic friends, or secretary to one of the many charitable institutions in which the Marchioness was interested.

But it was quite different now, when, instead of the credentials, her nephew could only offer her an explanation proving that he was responsible for their loss. His aunt was scarcely the woman to accept it in a right spirit. To suspect him of any personal interest in his protegée would be to prejudice her at once, and the more Ilden thought of her the more hopeless he felt of enlisting the help that would have been so valuable.

It seemed preposterous that he could not help the girl himself, when he had both the will and the means. Why could he not out of his wealth offer her an allowance sufficient at least to keep her out of want until she found something to do?

The thing was not to be thought of, of course. In the first place, he knew that she would never accept it, and he racked his brains trying to find some possible way of escape for her from her difficulties.

And yet he was scarcely conscious of disappointment when inquiries at the inn made the chance of their tracing the Despards appear more remote than ever.

It appeared that their departure had been raised by village gossip to the dignity of a mystery. Mr. Despard had not been seen in Lallerton for some time, although nobody knew precisely when he had left home.

His sister, however, had been gone only four days, taking her maid with her, but nobody had known that they were leaving the cottage for good, until on the following day a van came from Marnham Market to remove the furniture.

"We thought then that we should know where they had gone to," said the landlady, who was gossiping as she laid the cloth in a dismal little sitting-room for their lunch; "but it remained just as great a secret as ever. The furniture has only been taken to Marnham to warehouse."

Her tone suggested that she felt personally injured by her inability to satisfy curiosity.

"And I suppose you have no idea why they left Lallerton?" asked Ilden, half expecting to hear a tale of unpaid bills.

The woman hesitated.

"Perhaps you are friends of Miss Despard?"

"She is a great friend of mine," said Florence quickly.

"Then I am sure I hope that it is not true, ma'am. But they do say in the village that the young lady got into trouble with some gentleman who was staying at Castledale, just over the hill, in the summer."

Florence flushed and turned pale.

"No, I do not think that can be true," she said.

"No," remarked Ilden, "stories like that are so easily invented when there is a little mystery to explain."

"Had the Despards no friends here who would be likely to know what has become of them?" he asked when the landlady had left them alone to their meal. Florence had grown silent and preoccupied, and a deep concern for her growing anxiety and hopelessness struggled in his mind with this new enjoyment of his responsibility.

To have a beautiful woman so entirely dependent upon his aid, so exclusively delivered over to his charge. For him it made quite a novel and pleasing romance, and he had to remind himself that for her it was almost a tragic one.

She shook her head.

"No, they lived a most secluded life. Daisy, I think, has always felt it to be dull, but she is ruled by her brother in everything, and he has never made friends. I shall never know where they have gone. And if I discovered——"

"Oh, I think they must have left some trace," he interrupted with affected sanguineness. "I propose making a voyage of investigation round the village. Perhaps you would like to stay here and rest."

He wanted to be alone to think out the problem quietly without the distraction of her presence, as she guessed intuitively. The anxiety in her face deepened.

"Do you think that you will be safe?"

"Safe?" he repeated.

The thought of his own mysterious danger had almost been forgotten in the concentration of his mind on a new problem, and her unforgetfulness touched him when she reminded him.

"You may have been traced here already. I feel afraid as soon as you are out of my sight. But——"

She did not finish the sentence. She was thinking that the time must come very quickly when it would no longer be possible for her to keep him in her sight, or feel that she was helping in some small way to guard him from danger.

He answered almost indifferently. Once more the plot against his life had become an unreal thing, which it was difficult for him to realise or take account of.

Florence, however, could not forget the sinister scene of the previous night so easily, and her beautiful face was full of a repressed fear and anxiety as she watched him leave the inn in the direction of the village

She was evidently trying to attract his attention to some object in the path. A moment later and she had completely disappeared.

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street. Standing where he could not see her if he looked back she watched him with apprehensive eyes until he was out of sight.

Then she turned back to the dismal little sitting-room to try and forget his danger and concentrate her mind on her own hopeless plans. She would have to leave Lallerton, of course; but her heart filled with a double bitterness at the thought. For away from Lallerton the world seemed very cold and friendless, and she would never know what happened to the man she would leave there until it was too late. Her eyes filled with tears, but it was not at the thought of her own uncertain future.

Meanwhile, Ilden was pursuing his investigations without much hope of result. They served to give an object to his wanderings while his mind busied itself over the problem of Florence Courthorpe's future.

An interview with the Rector of the parish served to show him that the rumoured reason for Miss Despard's departure was a generally accepted one. As for her destination, the Rector could hazard no surmise. He seemed a little indignant at being consulted on the subject when the Despards had never been members of his flock. But Ilden gained from him two facts that might be useful. The cottage which they had vacated was the property of the squire of the parish, whose residence, Lallerton Hall, was at the other end of the village. He was as likely as anybody to know what the Despards' movements were. The other piece of information was that, although Miss Despard had taken one of her servants, an elderly woman, with her, she had left another behind her, a young girl who was living now with her parents in the village.

Ilden copied the name and address down in his pocket-book and took his leave. He had two places already to visit, and took the servant's cottage first as being the nearer.

The girl herself, Clara Wimple, was not at home. She had gone on an errand to Shipton Gate, but was expected back shortly. A garrulous mother made it apparent to him, however, that he was not likely to gain anything by waiting to interview her. The girl, it seemed, had left Miss Despard's service nearly a month before the latter left "Chez-Nous." The departure had been as much a surprise to her as to anybody else.

Nor at the Hall was Ilden any more successful.

On the day that the furniture was removed from "Chez-Nous," the squire had received an intimation from Mr. Despard that he was leaving Lallerton, and a cheque in lieu of notice. Reference to his papers showed that the letter had been posted at Marnham Market, where Despard had also given orders for the warehousing of his furniture.

Ilden turned back to the inn with his impression confirmed that his charge could find no home with her former friend. And the question of what to do with her became more than ever pressing. The day was advancing, and the longer she remained in his personal care the greater would be the need of explanation, when he enlisted the interest of his aunt or some other lady friend on her behalf.

The thought of doing so was still unpalatable. It had seemed outrageous to him at the first that Gerald Courthorpe's sister should be suing for a situation like a nursery-maid, and all that he had seen of her had served only to make him tolerate the position less.

He was approaching the village again along the high road that led from the Hall, when his attention was attracted by the sight of a young woman leaning over the high wall of roughly-piled stones which divided the road from the fields. She was a hundred yards or so in advance of him, and it seemed to Ilden that she was trying to attract his attention.

He hastened his steps, so forgetful of the shadow hanging over his life that he never thought of caution.

The girl seemed to be pointing now to something on the path. Ilden hastened more than ever, his curiosity fully aroused, but before he could reach the spot where he had seen her, the young woman had disappeared, and he looked up at the tall wall wonderingly. Then his eyes turned to the path where she seemed to point, and his wonder increased. For lying on the gravel was an envelope with a name written upon it.

When he found that the name was his own, wonder turned to something akin to consternation. He had been scrupulously careful since leaving Witterby not to give his name to anybody, although both the rector and the squire had asked it. To see the words "Lord Ilden" staring at him from the paper here in a place where he thought himself so completely unknown, filled him for a moment with a thrill of almost superstitious fear.

He thrust the paper into his pocket before even stopping to see what was written inside, to clamber up the wall. But no sign of the woman was to be seen. It was easy enough for her to have hidden where the fields were so hilly and so thickly intercepted with hedges, but the loss of all trace of her added to his feeling of strangeness. It seemed almost as though some supernatural agency were at work to prevent him hiding his identity for a day, and he remained for full five minutes staring in vain from the top of the wall before getting down to read the message so mysteriously delivered.

Only One Way to End the Plot.

"Lord Ilden, if you value your life, you will keep clear of Lallerton."

Ilden stood and stared at the badly-written and ill-spelt words, which appeared to have been hastily scribbled in pencil on the sheet of paper which he had found thrown in his path.

Who could have sent him the warning? He gave up the attempt to form a conjecture in sheer hopelessness. He had no starting point—no loose end of a clue by which he might even begin to unravel the mystery surrounding him. The intrigue against him surrounded him on every side. Here, in this quiet village, where he had imagined himself quite unknown—where he certainly knew nobody—it seemed that his life was just as much in danger as it had been at Pennybrook.

A feeling almost of despair seized him. The fight was too unequal when he was forced to walk in darkness, and his enemies seemed to know everything that he did.

It appeared from the scribbled warning that he had a friend; but of what use was a friend who remained as unknown as the enemy against whom she warned him.

The thought occurred to him that he might try to find the girl who had thrown the note; but she had shown plainly enough that she was anxious to avoid him, and, while he was searching in the dark, the enemy was awaiting his opportunity with eyes open.

He took out the envelope he had found in the coppice at Pennybrook, and compared the writing on it with that of his strangely-delivered warning; but a glance was sufficient to tell him that the writing was not the same. He was baffled in every attempt to form even the beginning of a theory, and in his bewilderment he was conscious of something nearer to actual fear than he had ever been conscious of in his life.

Even now, if the warning meant anything, the mysterious assassin might be lying in wait to take his life behind any one of the low stone walls which surrounded him.

He walked back to the inn absolutely nervous.

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He found Florence waiting for him anxiously in the little parlour.

"I have been very uneasy about you," she said frankly, as he sank into an ample armchair. "In a quiet little spot like this it seems as though anything might happen. You have heard nothing about my friends?"

"Nothing practical."

"I felt that you would not," she said, making a brave effort to keep her voice steady. "And I have been looking at the trains. I have decided to go to London. There is a train from Shipton Gate in an hour's time."

Ilden's face fell.

"To London? Have you friends there?"

"No, but there always seems a chance of getting employment in London. Here it is of course quite hopeless to think of such a thing. And I must find something before my money is spent."

Her voice was heroically cheerful. He wondered whether she realised as clearly as he did how tragically hopeless was the plan on which she had decided. He could not think of allowing her to carry it out.

"But I was hoping that you would help me in my troubles," he said, as they turned into the dismal sitting-room. "I have never needed an ally so much as now, or been so completely non-plussed."

Her eyes filled with instant alarm.

"Something has happened? You have been followed here after all?" she cried.

"I do not know whether I have been followed, or whether I have unconsciously followed my enemy, but it is known that I am in the village. It seems impossible for me to hide myself.

And he told her what had happened, feeling his own uneasiness decrease strangely as she began to share it.

"You will leave Lallerton at once?" she said.

"I suppose so, but this travelling about seems a hopeless business, when I am traced so easily. I was counting on having your help."

"I wish that *I could* help you," she said with her heart in her voice, "but what can I do?"

"There is only one thing which can put an end to this plot against me. And you are the only person I should care to ask to do it."

Florence's eyes opened wide with wonder and hope.

"I? I would do anything to make your life more safe," she said earnestly, and Ilden hesitated no longer.

"Would you even become my wife?"

(Florence's answer, among other things, is told in a further long instalment on Tuesday next.)

Mrs. Forrester's First Husband.

A Story of Blackmail and Love.

My name is Spencer Lockwood, my profession the law. As a barrister, not altogether briefless, I find it more difficult every year, even in vacation time, to get away from the Middle Temple for my annual fortnight's holiday.

Last year, it was a toss-up whether I should be able to go at all, so that it was much to my satisfaction that I found myself, one week-end, comfortably settled in snug quarters at the old-fashioned "King's Head" Hotel, Overcoombe, Bucks, in the very heart of the lovely Vale of Aylesbury.

I congratulated myself upon having left "pleas," "plaints," and all things legal far behind, for a time at any rate, absolutely unsuspicious that I was on the eve of becoming a leading actor in a stranger criminal drama than ever I had played in, in my capacity as advocate, at the Old Bailey.

"By Jove!" I said to myself as I sat at the open window after dinner, on the evening of my arrival, and watched a young lady, accompanied by an elder one, passing up the main street towards the railway station, "that's the sweetest-looking girl I have seen for many a day! Wonder who she is? I thought I knew pretty well everybody, by sight at least, in Overcoombe. I'll ask Jackson, perhaps he knows; or, rather, he's sure to know."

As Overcoombe had been my yearly place of retreat for the past five or six years, Jackson, the landlord of the King's Head, knew me well, and would have no hesitation in enlightening me as to the identity of the fair stranger.

"That, sir!" said Jackson, "is Mrs. Russell and her daughter."

"Russell!" I said. "Russell! I don't remember the name."

"Like as not, sir; they've only been here about six months; since just after Christmas."

"They look quite superior people, Jackson."

"They are, sir. Mrs. Russell, so I've heard, is the widow of a captain in the Navy, and, I should say, is pretty well off."

"Where do they live?"

"You know that old red-brick house, sir, on the Aylesbury road, half a mile the other side of the station?"

"I know; the place that was empty for so long. 'Sandilands' is the name of it, I think."

"That's it, sir! Well, that's where they live. The old lady's a bit soft-headed, so they say, hasn't a soul above tea-table gossip, and is about the worst mother a young girl could possibly have, according to my humble opinion."

All this only whetted my curiosity to know more of the young lady, a desire which the next day was gratified through the good offices of a mutual friend, who introduced me to Miss Russell.

She was young; in fact, barely twenty-one. She was good-looking, too, but wore, I thought, a depressed and anxious expression. Naturally, I concluded that she was in ill-health, a victim, perhaps, to the gaieties of the London season. Later on I hinted as much to Mrs. Russell, who, as it seemed to me, with somewhat heartless indifference deprecated the idea in no measured terms.

Netta Russell and I became very good friends, but came no nearer to getting at the reason of her trouble. Her strangeness of manner haunted me, and yet, after all, I thought, why should I worry about it. It did not concern me.

But I was not able to satisfy myself so easily. I was obliged to confess that my interest in Netta Russell was stronger than I had imagined. I was not in love with her; the idea was absurd, having regard to the shortness of the acquaintance, though she peculiarly interested me, and I earnestly wished to be of service to her.

An exploring pedestrian of the ardent order, I was making my way, towards the end of the week, through what was locally known as the "Nut Scrub."

This was, at least, a square mile, if not more, of dense hazel bushes, through which ran a narrow strip of path.

I was about half-way through this leafy tangle, when I heard voices within a stone's throw of me.

One of them was evidently a woman's, and, for the life of me, I could not shake off the impression that I knew its owner. The other was that of an uneducated, if not vulgar man.

"Very well, Mrs. Forrester!" the latter was saying. "I've give you Jack's message, and you'll only have yourself to

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blame if you don't do as he says. Which, shall I tell him, is it to be; you to go back to him, or—what I think'll suit him just as well, or, perhaps, better—that you send him, by me, five hundred pounds before the end of next week?"

"Neither!" replied the woman, in raised, decisive tones, "and you may tell him so!"

"You'd best listen to reason," persuasively replied the other. "Jack Forrester is a dangerous customer to cross, and I *know* as he'll never let you alone, or leave you, if you don't do one or the other of them two things."

"Well! you have my last word! I will do neither, and any attempt to molest me in any way will only bring trouble to you and to him."

"Have you any money about you now?"

"No; and if I had I would not give it you!"

"Supposing I were to take it! This is a pretty lonely spot; nobody could hear you, I fancy!"

It was Netta Russell without a doubt, and, unless I was mistaken, in sore strait from some blackmailing ruffian. That he addressed her as Mrs. Forrester did not for the moment appeal to me.

Forcing my way, in breakneck fashion, through the intervening scrub, in the direction of the voices, I came face to face with Miss Russell and her threatener.

"Don't be too sure of that!" I cried, addressing the latter, a truculent-looking, flashily-dressed specimen of the genus cockney. "I have overheard quite enough to know that you are intimidating this lady, and I warn you that if you don't sheer off on the instant, it will be the worse for you!"

The fellow looked me up and down, as if to calculate probabilities, but, judging discretion to be the wiser course, with a jeeringly defiant laugh, disappeared in the thicket to the right.

The immediate strain lifted, Netta Russell all but completely collapsed on the reaction, and I saw that there was nothing for it, but for me to accompany her home to Overcoombe.

Her helplessness rendered her still more an object of solicitude to me, and I begged her to, if possible, confide in me, so far, at least, as to enable me to do what I could for her.

She then, after a brief hesitation, told me the most extraordinary story, imposing upon me, however, the condition that I would not repeat it to a soul.

I, of course, assured her upon this point, and listened thunderstruck to what practically amounted to a confession.

"Miss Russell," I said, "I——"

"That is not my name," she interrupted me.

"Not your name?" I exclaimed.

"No. Not a human being knows what I am going to tell you—I am married."

"Married!" I echoed.

"Yes; I was married nearly four years ago, and my name is—is Forrester."

Then she went on to say that when—a girl of seventeen—she was staying with some friends at Scarborough, she met a man with whom she fell in love. Handsome, fascinating, and knowing far more of the world than she did; she believed in him. His proposal to marry her, on the condition that she should keep the matter a profound secret for a month, so that he might obtain the consent of his father—who, he said, was a wealthy landed proprietor in the Midlands—she innocently agreed to.

She, indeed, told her mother, who, with the imbecility natural to her, made no inquiries; letting the girl in fact do just as she pleased.

Leaving home one day on the pretext of paying a visit to a relative in London, she met Jack Forrester, by arrangement, at a certain little church in Chelsea, and was married with only the pew-opener and verger as witnesses.

The catastrophe was not long delayed.

At the entrance of the hotel, where they were to dine, her new-made husband was arrested on a charge of "long-firm" swindling, by a couple of detectives, who it appeared had been upon his track for days.

Not staying to think or to hear more, she returned home at once, and managed to keep the whole wretched affair a secret.

Her mother thought it was but an engagement; weak-minded as she was, she never dreamt of a run-away marriage. Had she known that, Netta's life would have been unbearable. The poor girl just threw away her wedding-ring, and resigned herself to misery.

In little more than a year, she saw in a paper that her husband was dead. He had tried to escape from Dartmoor, and had been shot.

Though once more free, she was never able to shake off the haunting memory of her mistake and its consequences. Her conscience upraided her with deception as towards her mother, with passing under a false name, and with posing as an unmarried girl, when she was in reality a widow.

"But this man," I said, "who is he—the man I mean who accosted you this afternoon?"

He had followed, she explained to me, upon a letter—a terrible letter—received from her husband.

"But," said I, a bit bewildered, "I thought you said he was dead."

"Yes—yes!—I quite believed so; but I suppose the man who had tried to escape was another of the same name. He demands——"

"I know," I interrupted her. "Your return to him, or a sum of money."

"I would sooner die than return to him; and as for five hundred pounds, I haven't it, and would not send it to him if I had."

"You have his letter?" I asked her.

She produced it and gave it me.

"You are sure that it is his handwriting?"

"No; I am not sure, but I think it is—I never had a letter from him before."

In a flash I saw what ought to be done, and at once.

"You must answer this letter," I said.

"No;" she replied, "I will *not* write to him!"

Then I sought to show her that if she would write a note at my dictation, saying that at that moment she had no money, but promising to send him some in the course of a few days, I would take charge of it, and go to London with it.

The same evening I left Overcoombe with the letter in my pocket, and within three hours had laid the whole case before the smartest private detective in town.

In three days he had news for me. Jack Forrester, confidence-man, swindler, and cracksman, had been undoubtedly married to Netta Russell; and, as undoubtedly, was now dead, in the way the newspapers had stated.

The relief I felt was immense. Netta was free, and the way was open to me to win her for myself if I could.

There was, however, one little thing more to discover—the writer of the letter.

"I think," said the detective, "that if you will wait half an hour, my agent will have something to tell us about this very enterprising gentleman." As, indeed he had.

He reported that having taken Netta's note to the address given—a tobacco shop—he left it to be called for.

He found that a man had been asking for letters in the same name, each day for the two previous days.

Posting himself in the passage, the agent saw the man come and receive the letter, and shadowed him home. He knew him as a notorious "crook."

Handing his memo-book to his principal, the latter read out:

"Name, Earney. Well-known turf operator. Ten years in 1888. Out on ticket."

It was decided, subject to Netta Russell's opinion, that nothing much was to be gained by a prosecution of the rascal.

It is needless to say that I caught the first train back to Overcoombe, and that, prepared by a wire from me, Netta met me at the station.

Already she looked brighter, and comparatively free of her melancholy.

I found, too, to my great satisfaction, that she had told her mother everything.

Netta married a year later. Who she married you may well guess, and I think I may suggest that her second husband was an improvement upon her first.

E. Ralph.

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A DOUBLE EVENT.

A Tale of Four Lovers.

"What in Tophet is amiss with me to-night?" muttered General Warringham savagely, as he strolled restlessly out of the glittering ball-room at Lady Merton's. "I'm as seedy as a Smyrna fig! It's that confounded boy of mine, I suppose!"

The General stepped on to the terrace, and thence down the broad flight of marble steps into the lovely gardens of Doringham Park, where he resumed his meditations.

"The puppy has had his own way in everything, and I have never interfered. But when it comes to marrying *her* daughter—by Jove! it's time I put my heel down!"

He stopped, took a choice Havana from his cigar-case, viciously bit off the end, and lit it with a scented fusee. The light revealed a frown upon his handsome sun-burnt face that was not agreeable.

"Hang it!" he muttered, as he resumed his walk, "why couldn't the lad have chosen someone else—*anyone* else but *her* daughter!"

He walked on, musing as he went, down the long, curving paths, white in the moonlight, which intersected the beautiful summer-gardens of Doringham Hall. There was not a breath of wind to disturb the stillness of the lovely scene around him. Not a leaf stirred among the branches of the stately old trees that skirted the moonlit gardens. Exquisitely tinted fairy-lamps glowed with a subdued radiance from every point.

Not a bough but had its pendant of sparkling jewels. Not a bush that did not lift its blushing roses to be kissed and beautified by the warm, amorous light that dropped in limpid streams from glistening globes. Even the fountains, merry in their play, sent forth their gurgling jets of sparkling water into the warm air above. And then, as if unwilling to desert such fair enchantment, they shook out their dewy tresses in the air, till every drop became a diamond, full of liquid light, which rained, in cascades of reflected radiance, among the many multi-tinted lamps which lit the fountains, and fell into the marble basins beneath.

Yet, though moon, stars and fairy lamps combined to dissipate the darkness, they only served to vaguely outline shadows which, before, had seemed not to exist. The air was still and warm and languorous. A subtle tropical enchantment brooded, like an angel's wing, upon the sleeping scene. Ever and anon, the General caught a fleeting glimpse of other guests who, like himself, had left the dazzling glories of the ball, to wander out among the gardens. But these, he saw, were generally in pairs.

"Ugh!" he grunted. "Poor deluded fools! But time will teach them wisdom! I wonder whether *they* are out here too. I've half a mind to go back and investigate. But that would be distinctly 'nosing'—quite a feminine mode of strategy—so the other half of my mind is, perhaps, the wiser."

He was gradually approaching the outskirts of the gardens, where the great, stately trees of the surrounding park shut in the fairy scene. But he still walked on, unconscious of the path he took, and lost in reverie.

"And *she* objects as well!" he mused, as a little puzzled look came into his face. "I wonder why. It is but natural *I* should do so, after all that has passed. But what cause has *she* to forbid her daughter's union with my son? It is not possible our reasons are identical. Confound the boy!—and the girl too, for that matter—one is as bad as the other! By Jove, there almost seems a fate in it! But it shan't be!—if I have to turn the boy adrift, it *shan't* be! I'll see him — Hullo!—there's a lady in front! Just my luck! Give a man a chance to relieve his pent-up feelings with a wholesome British oath, and a woman bobs up to strangle it in its birth! I wonder what she's doing out here alone. Same old game, I suppose. Going about like a roaring lion—by Jove, no!—that's an insult to his majesty the king of beasts!—fox is the animal—sneaking about like a cunning old fox, seeking whom she may devour! The saints be praised, I'm past such peril! But I don't want to be recognised, mooning around out here in this veritable hot-bed of sentimental impropriety, so I'll hang back a bit."

Apparently the lady in question had also been made aware of the close proximity of a stranger, for she immediately quickened her steps, and was soon lost to view in the dim, uncertain light. No other path diverged from the one the General was pursuing, and he had a fancy for the deep shadow of the tall trees that towered before him. So, after waiting a few moments to allow the lady to get well in advance, he once again resumed his walk. A short stroll brought him to the verge of the gardens, and he stood under the jewelled branches of the stately sentinels which girt them about. Two other paths here joined the one from which he had emerged, but no one was in sight.

Presently he saw a low, trellised structure close to where he stood. It proved to be a pretty, creeper-covered summer-house, standing among the fragrant flower-beds of the garden, and, though the roses and creepers without were illumined here and there with softly shining fairy-lamps, the inside—either by accident or design, but probably the latter—had been left in deepest shadow. The place looked quiet and inviting, so, after listening for a moment to assure himself that no one was within, the General entered the low porch and tried to discover the nature of the interior.

The structure had been curiously built. It was circular in shape, but appeared to have been cut into four quarters, and placed at a distance of some four feet from each other. Thus it presented the appearance of four summer-houses. The two cross-cuts that had been made in the circle formed transverse passages, terminating in four rose-latticed porches, one of which the General had entered. These passages had originally been open to the sky, but were so thickly covered with creeper and vine as to be impenetrable even in the day. Entrance to the four summer-houses, or arbours, could only be obtained from these passages, the outsides being thickly trellised. There was just sufficient light to reveal this much to the General, and, as nothing stirred within, he entered one of the arbours and sat down on the rustic seat with which it was provided.

"Another impropriety of Lady Merton's!" he grumbled under his breath. "Thank Heaven, however, no one—or perhaps I should say, no *two*—have availed themselves of such an unqualified aid to folly! I wonder at it, too, for folly—or at any rate, *that* sort of folly—is amazingly keen in discovering the existence of such disgraceful nooks as this. There's that boy of mine, for instance—confound him!"

The General took a long, last, stubborn pull at the butt of his Havana, and tossed it viciously out into the dark passage. A moment later he heard the sound of footsteps on the gravel outside.

"Ah!" he muttered grimly, "I am a little premature!"

The footsteps were coming nearer.

"I'll bet there's two of 'em!" he went on in a whisper.

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"Twenty to one in shillings there's a deuce of 'em! If there isn't, General Warringham, you will send a sovereign first thing to-morrow morning to the Dogs' Home as a donation for the benefit of the inmates—anonymously too—that's a wager!"

The footsteps sounded beneath the porch, came slowly down the dark passage, and entered an arbour on the opposite side of the summer-house. Presently a voice, which he knew well, said:

"Someone has been smoking in here! I wonder if they are here still."

There was silence for a moment, during which the General sat bolt upright upon his seat—grim and frowning.

"They must have gone," resumed the voice. "The place is as deserted as people in our position could wish to find it."

Then followed two sounds. The first was unmistakably a laugh—a merry, boyish laugh. But the second is altogether untranslatable upon paper. It reached the ear of the General, however, and he immediately became even more rigid and grim and angry.

"The Dogs' Home has lost that little bet," he whispered to himself. "Hang the Dogs' Home!" he went on. "I wish the yelping little beasts had won! Confound that boy! What the dickens does he mean by coming here, after my strict injunction to him only this afternoon to discontinue this impossible and preposterous business! By my spurs, it's sheer mutiny—bare-faced rebellion—and he ought to be tried by court-martial!"

He bit his moustache savagely and listened.

"Milly," said the young man, when the extraordinary sound above mentioned had been repeated. "I am loth to distress you, but I feel it my duty to conceal nothing from you that touches our betrothal. I had a talk with my father this afternoon, darling, and he still persists in reiterating his objections to our engagement."

"Did he say why, Harold?" asked the girl.

"No. I asked him point-blank, but he curtly said that was *his* affair."

"It seems so unreasonable," said Milly after a pause. "There must be some cause for his antipathy to me."

"He *has* no antipathy to you, dearest. That is the most inexplicable part of the mystery. He said distinctly he had no doubt that you were gentle and good, and all that could be desired in the choice of a wife. But he had reasons—indisputable reasons—wholly unconnected with yourself—for strongly opposing our engagement."

"Mamma talks in exactly the same strain," said the girl with a sigh. "I wish I could discover this secret, which proves such an obstacle to our love."

"Not to our love, darling," said Harold quickly—and again the untranslatable sound reached the General's ear—"To its fulfilment, yes—but not to our love. That is incapable of change."

"There is comfort in that, dear Harold," said Milly, "but can we not unravel the threads of this dark mystery?"

"Well," responded Harold, "let us look the matter square in the face. We have known each other from children—ever since the time when we were both called upon to suffer a common loss—the loss of a parent—you, of your father—I, of my mother. No restraint has been put upon our intimacy or our friendship, and, until the question of marriage was broached, everything went on swimmingly. But that consideration completely changed the situation. Immediately the possibility of such a contingency is mentioned, the governor and your respected mamma kick up rough, put a damper on our little plan, exercise their high authority, and read us homilies on filial obedience. They both declare that *we* are not the causes of this unlooked-for decree—consequently, we must look elsewhere. The governor does not dislike your mother, nor, so far as I can see, does she hate him. True, they are not given to gush when they meet, but people of five-and-forty seldom do, and they are always polite and amiable to each other."

"Harold," interrupted Milly, "I may be silly and fanciful, but I sometimes think their amiability—if not their politeness—is a trifle forced. There is a look in the General's eyes when he looks at mamma that has often surprised me. I cannot define it, or even guess its meaning, but it is indisputably there."

"You are quicker than I, darling," said Harold thoughtfully, "for I have never noticed it. What on earth can be the reason?"

"I do not know," said Milly plaintively. "They say a good detective should excel in two things—observation and deduction. I may do something of the former, but the latter is beyond my power."

"Never mind—you do the observing, and I'll try my hand at deducing from your observations," said Harold hopefully. "The plot thickens, as they say in the play—or perhaps—perhaps it isn't quite so treacley already. Have you observed anything else, Miss Scotland Yard?"

The girl laughed, and the General had to wait for the resumption of the conversation until a little by-play had been gone through, whereat he was greatly scandalised—or imagined he was. Presently Milly resumed:

"Yes, dear—something very surprising. I have never spoken of it before, because it seemed so strange and unaccountable. From the day the General sailed for the Transvaal to the day when he returned, some six months ago, mamma was never like herself. The day he left England, she locked herself in her room and saw no one. Whenever news came from the war, she was almost beside herself with excitement until she had read the details. Then she would generally become more composed. But sometimes it made her even more agitated than before. She would never let me look at the papers, but took them up to her own room. One day I saw her open the paper, and give a great start. I pretended not to notice her, but covertly watched her all the time. Her face grew deathly white at first—then she blushed—I have never seen mamma blush so vividly before. Then, as she read, I saw the tears trickle down her cheeks.

Harold, dear, I may not be skilled in reading countenances, but this I *do* know—they were not the tears of sorrow, but of joy. I felt as if I could have cried too, and fearing lest she should see me, I walked quietly to the window. Presently I heard a sob, and, looking round a moment later, found that she was gone. The paper lay upon the table, where she had left it, so I picked it up. And what do you think I read?"

"Heaven only knows!" said Harold irreverently—"but go on, for goodness' sake!—this is growing exciting!"

Milly laughed.

"On the top of the page, in big black type, I read this heading:

'GENERAL WARRINGHAM'S SPLENDID VICTORY!

THE GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT OF THE WAR!

A Masterpiece of Military Manœuvring and Unparalleled Bravery!'

No doubt you remember the incident well enough, Harold."

"Rather!" he ejaculated, with a note of unmistakable pride in his young voice. "Three cheers for the governor!" And he would actually have given them, had not Milly promptly restrained his enthusiasm by stopping his mouth in a very (from the General's point of view) gracefully immodest way — a process which was evidently infectious.

"Well," said Milly a few moments later, "what do you make of it all?"

"I'm hanged if I know!" was the rejoinder. "Have you told me all?"

"Yes—all—except one thing. Later in the day, I saw mamma reading a bundle of old letters, and, while I was looking, a photograph dropped from one, which looked just like the General must have looked when he was your age. It seems so odd, for they did not know each other then."

"They did!—they did!—they *must* have

YOU MAY WIN A GRAMOPHONE BY READING THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT OF "A FOE IN THE FAMILY." SEE PAGE 527.

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dono!" almost shouted Harold. "What fools—what asses—what unmitigated idiots we have been, not to have guessed it long ago!"

"Eh? What did you say?" said Milly with dignity. "Speak for yourself, sir!"

For answer, he took her in his arms and kissed her rapturously.

"By Jove!" he blurted out, "you're a regular brick, Milly! You've given me the key of this mystery, and now I'll see it through, so don't worry any more. Now let us go back to the dancers."

A few more of those indescribable sounds, and they turned to go.

"I think I have a plan," said Harold meditatively, as they went out.

But Fate decreed that Harold's plan could very well be dispensed with in the working out of this little drama.

Ten minutes later the General went out too. Just outside he paused, and, as he did so, another figure glided from the summer-house—a dress rustled in the rose-trellised porch, and a woman stood beside him in the dim, uncertain light of the fairy-lamps. Some instinct told him who she was, and the same instinct apprised him of the fact that she had been crying.

"You heard?" he said, in a voice that would have disgraced him on parade.

"Yes. Did you?"

"H'm!" assented the General gruffly.

There was an awkward pause. Then the General turned and faced his companion.

"And you—you cared?" he asked huskily.

No answer.

"Madge," he said, "we have let a foolish quarrel of our foolish youth wreck half our lives. Can we not remedy the past by finding happiness in the possession of each other in the future?"

She laid her head contentedly on his shoulder, and the General lifted up the happy, tearful face and kissed it.

"Thank God!" she whispered in his ear, "the day has come at last! But it has seemed so long, dear—so very long!"

"We married the wrong people last time, Madge," he said, "but this time there'll be no mistake."

Again he stooped and kissed the upturned face with such warmth and tenderness that even he himself marvelled at the change which, in a few brief moments of time, had been wrought in the opinions which he had so very recently voiced.

Next morning, Harold was summoned to his father's study, where the General awaited him. Evidently desirous of getting through with what he had to say, the General plunged awkwardly in the business by announcing his withdrawal of his former objections to his son's engagement with Milly. He even went so far as to approve the match. Harold stared in bewildered amazement, and the General, noticing this surprise, attempted to explain. He stammered—grew confused—and even blushed—but it all came out bit by bit. And Harold, who had been bottling up his feelings during the recital, burst forth at last.

"Hurrah!" he shouted, as he executed a sand-jig on the study carpet and clapped his astonished and somewhat outraged parent on the back—"Hurrah! Three cheers for the governor! Hip, hip, hurrah! Never too late to mend! Who the dev—I beg pardon! Who'd have thought it! Well I'm blowed!"

And he dashed wildly out of the room, leaving his bewildered parent in a state of mingled surprise, confusion, outraged dignity, amusement and happiness, and tore off to acquaint Milly with the astounding developments of the morning.

But Milly knew already, and he found her waiting for him with her mother's sanction.

And six months later, the newspapers announced, what the sporting world would call—A Double Event.

W. J. Mowbray.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

October 21. — Those celebrating their birthdays to-day will have a favourable year for business; not a good time to travel and change.

Girls born between two and four p.m. need much caution and prudence in their love affairs.

The day is good for writing letters, asking favours, and dealing with doctors and military men.

A child born here will be active and ambitious; fond of travel, and will probably go abroad.

October 22. — Business will need careful attention during the next twelve months by those whose birthdays fall to-day. The mind inclined to pleasure and society.

Girls will meet with strange experiences in love matters, and must have a care where they place confidence.

The day is evil for most matters; guard against mishap, especially with water. Not good to deal with landlords or property.

A child born here will be fond of the sea, and give much thought to music, pleasure, and the opposite sex.

October 23.—Much worry and anxiety over business, health, and general affairs. Avoid law and quarrels; some trouble with property.

Young girls have an anxious time with opposite sex; disappointments, and broken engagements.

The day is not good for signing papers, buying property, asking favours, marriage, or visiting.

A child born this day will be moody, suspicious, and ill-tempered. The constitution will not be strong.

October 24.—A year to avoid speculation; do not change or start new things. Health will need some extra care.

Girls will have cause for jealousy; some opposition in love affairs.

The day is one of uncertainty; go quietly.

A child born to-day will be active, generous, and high-spirited. Not very successful in business.

October 25.—A favourable birthday for those born on this date. Business, health, and domestic matters are favoured.

Young girls are much interested over news and letters, those engaged marry during the next twelve months.

A good day to travel, write letters, marry, visit, engage servants, and speculate.

A child born here will be fortunate and make headway in life. Will be clever, cheerful, witty, and inventive.

October 26.—A mixed year; favourable for those in employ. Have a care against law and accident. Insure against fire.

Girls will need some tact or they quarrel with lovers.

A child born this day will be headstrong, ambitious, active, and daring. Will be fortunate in the employ of others.

October 27.—Rather fortunate for landlords, aged people, and farmers. Avoid risky speculations and do not change or travel.

Girls born near seven p.m. will receive attentions from married men and need care in love matters.

The day is good for dealing with landlords and shipping agents, but evil for speculating and engaging servants.

A child born to-day will be thoughtful, but unsettled, and not very fortunate in business.

Asturel.

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A Story of Hospital Life.

A Good Man's Love.

"Are the apple trees in bloom in the orchard? I thought I heard the bees humming amongst them."

The sister of the ward who had stopped beside No. 6 bed thought that her patient was delirious, and looked down at her anxiously. But the woman in the bed met her glance with a pair of blue eyes that were unclouded and clear—she smiled faintly.

"I wonder," she said, "if the orchard is all pink and white with apple blossom, from my window it used to look like a sea of bloom; and the air that blew in upon me was so sweet. I wish"—she sighed and broke off all at once, turning her face sharply to the wall.

"You must feel that London is very strange after the quiet of the country," Sister Helen said gently, "how glad you will be to go back there. Perhaps the apple trees will still be in bloom when you are well enough to leave the hospital."

"Go *back?*" The woman turned her face as sharply round towards the nurse, as she had just now turned it away. "Go back—I shall never go back to the farm again—I am not likely ever to see the orchard any more; I wish I didn't dream of it all every night—every night now. It's being in this great hospital does it. I never dreamt of the orchard—and of—home, before I came in here."

She moved restlessly, and the sister laid cool fingers upon her hot head. "You must try not to worry and fret yourself," she said, "we want you to get well."

"What's the use of my getting well? What is the object of saving a useless life like mine? It was a pity anybody ever brought me in here; why couldn't they have let me die in peace?"

Sister Helen was a very tactful, and a very sympathetic woman. She saw that her patient was excited and overtired, and that this was no moment for talking to her. Stroking her hand very softly again with those cool, firm fingers whose touch in itself was restful, she said:

"I think we must have a talk some time, just now I have several patients to see before their bedtime! And I want you to promise me to try to go to sleep, and do not think of any worries for a while. Will you do this to please me?" There was something in Sister Helen's quiet voice, and in the glance of her grey eyes; not to say in the compelling touch of her hand—that always made her patients anxious to please her. The woman in No. 6 bed was no exception to the rule. She smiled up into her nurse's face, and a more restful look came over her own.

"I'll try and do what you wish," she said, "and sometime, when you are not busy, I should like to talk to you—about—about—oh!—many things."

And then, as the sister moved away, the patient turned her face to the wall again.

Sister Helen's thoughts that evening very often went back to the woman in No. 6 bed; whose name, as set forth on the board that hung over it, was Elsie Dangerfield. She had been brought into the hospital a week before, sent by a doctor who said that he had found her in a miserable lodging house, desperately ill, and apparently on the verge of starvation. The sister remembered noticing as she helped to undress the woman, how old and worn her clothes were; her boots almost in holes; her dress threadbare. She recollected too how she had realised that this woman in spite of her worn and haggard face was not really old; and that she must once have possessed great beauty, traces of which still lingered in spite of the ravages which time had made.

Sister Helen's heart had ached often and often over the wreck of womanhood that lay in No. 6 bed; but to-day was the first time that Elsie Dangerfield had spoken in any way of herself or her past. She had been civil and pleasant to her nurses; but beyond that she had never gone—until to-day—and her words about the farm and the apple blossom in the orchard had roused Sister Helen's interest in her afresh. It was not till late on the following afternoon that the busy sister had a moment to sit down beside Elsie Dangerfield, and she began her talk with the sick woman by speaking pleasantly of other matters, and not of the patient herself. Then after a little pause, she said tactfully and gently.

"Last night we settled to have a little talk, didn't we? I wonder whether you will tell me now about your old home—and lovely orchard you spoke of?"

The woman's face flushed; she moved uneasily.

"I don't know that I want to tell you now," she said sullenly, "it all belongs to the past—the stupid old past, which I have forgotten."

There was defiance in her voice, "the present is enough for me, the future is—a blank."

"Oh! surely not that?" Sister Helen spoke soothingly. "I think perhaps you will find the future has some good things in store for you."

Elsie Dangerfield laughed harshly.

"Not it," she said; "there are no good things in store for *me*. I have made my bed and I must lie on it, even if it is a bed of nettles."

She was silent for a few seconds, then she burst out suddenly:

"I will tell you—though you will hate me afterwards, or preach at me. All you good women either loathe or preach at we women who are not good."

Sister Helen did not answer, but her grey eyes met the defiant blue ones that glared at her from the pillow, with such tenderness in their depths, that a look of shame crossed the patient's face.

"I believe you are really good," she said more quietly, "perhaps you can forgive sinners. But I will tell you the truth. Long ago—I think I have lost count now of how long it was—I lived in a farm away in Surrey. I had always lived in that village, and everybody said I was a lucky girl when Godfrey Dangerfield of Manly Farm asked me to be his wife. I wasn't sure about my own luck—because—because I was a *fool*." She spoke vehemently. "I had read a lot of silly trash about the life of a town, and the gay times folks had in London, and I thought I was buried there in the country, and that if I married Godfrey I should be doing him an honour, and sacrificing my own chance of seeing something of what I called life. Oh! I was a fool—a fool—a fool. Well, I married Godfrey; I thought after all it would be nice to be the mistress of Manly Farm, and raised above my old neighbours and friends—and it was very pleasant to be made much of, as Godfrey made much of me. He treated me like a queen—and I—I broke his heart." There was a long pause, and it was in a lower, more broken voice that the sick woman went on.

"My home was as beautiful as any woman could wish. It stood upon a hill, and from my door, and out of my windows, I looked across the open country to the great hills. My God! how I have longed sometimes in these city streets, to see the hills again. Just below my bedroom the orchard climbed up behind the house, and the scent of the blossoms came in to

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me in the early mornings when the blackbirds whistled in the branches of the apple trees, and the larks sang on the hillside. I ought to have been a happy woman—my home was so lovely—my husband was so good to me. But I was discontented all the time. I wanted gaiety and amusement. I pined for city life, I thought I was wasted in the country—I was a pretty woman then, sister, very pretty, they told me Godfrey was patient with me in spite of all my cross ways; he was always loving and tender, always trying to think of ways to amuse me and keep me happy—and I was never grateful to him! One day he came and told me he had taken places for some play that was to be acted in the country town three miles away; he thought I should be amused, and that it would be a change for me. I was pleased enough and excited over it; for even strolling players in a country town seemed to me delightful—then. So we went—Godfrey and I. But after that night I was just wild to go and be a player myself, I hated my life more than ever. I could think of nothing but the glory and delight of being on the stage, and of hearing ringing cheers of applause. I was dazzled with the pictures my own silly fancy painted; and I hated my peaceful life more than ever—and then, oh! sister, one day I threw it all away, my beautiful home, my peaceful life—and worse than all, my husband's love. In a fit of impatient anger, I ran away from home, and came to London." She paused and Sister Helen said gently:

"But your husband—did he not follow you?"

"I left him no address—I wrote him a note saying I was sick of my dull life, and that I had gone away for ever—I came to London, and I managed to get work in a small, out-of-the-way theatre—but—oh! nurse, I cannot tell you of all my life since the day I left my home. I have sunk down lower and lower; and—and when I was no longer pretty or young I sank lower still—down to the depths of misery and want and wretchedness till, when the doctor found me—I was nearly starving. I have been a wicked woman—a wicked woman; but if only I might know that Godfrey forgave me, I should die happy!"

"But have you written to your husband?"

"No—oh no—I am not fit to write to him; I am not fit," and all at once she burst into low sobbing, then controlled herself suddenly, and said, "if I die, sister, will you send and tell my husband that I was sorry, bitterly, bitterly sorry for all I did. Godfrey Dangerfield, Manly Farm, Harefield—that will find him."

Sister Helen gave the desired promise, and soothed her patient to the best of her power; and that night in her own room she thought long and anxiously over the sick woman's story, making up her mind finally to a strange step.

Two days later there stood at the door of the ward a tall man with a kind, strong face who asked for Sister Helen. And when he was taken into her sitting-room to her he held out his hand and grasped hers in a grip that almost hurt her.

"God bless you," he said, and his voice shook, "you must be a good woman."

Sister Helen looked into the strong face, and the kindly brown eyes, and instinctively trusted their owner.

"You are Mr. Godfrey Dangerfield, are you not?" she said. "Was I wrong to write to you? I could not make up my mind at first what was right to do; and then it seemed to me that I must write and tell you that your wife is here. I think I was right, because—you have come."

"I am sure you were right," he answered. "My poor little wife; my poor Elsie. If she knew how I have searched for her all these years; how I have grieved for her; she would not speak of forgiveness!—May I see her?"

"You know, Mr. Dangerfield, that she is very, very ill; and that you will find her terribly changed. You must let me prepare her a little for seeing you. I felt you would come, but I hardly thought you would come so soon."

"I came at once, directly I had read your letter," he said, and his voice was surprised, "of course I came at once."

And through Sister Helen's mind swung the words, "Thy love to me was wonderful." Truly this man's was a wonderful love.

Sister Helen went softly to the bedside of Elsie Dangerfield and told her very quietly that someone wanted to see her.

"To see me? Why I haven't a friend in the world," the sick woman said, and laughed harshly, "it must be some mistake."

"No, it is no mistake," Sister Helen replied, "it is—an old friend—who is very anxious to see you, and who has come—a long way on purpose to do so."

A flush of colour flamed over the white face.

"It is not Godfrey—it could not be Godfrey," she said brokenly, "that is impossible—how could he know?" Her voice trailed into silence as Sister Helen walked swiftly away, returning in a moment with a tall man at her side.

Elsie Dangerfield's bed was in a corner of the ward surrounded by screens, and it was not until the sister and her companion were close to her side that Elsie caught sight of her visitor—as the sister stole away. Then with a little cry the sick woman covered her face with her hands, saying brokenly:

"Oh, why have you come? You cannot ever forgive me, when you know—when you know——"

"I do not want to know anything, my dear," Godfrey answered gravely, and as he spoke, he knelt down beside his wife's bed, and took her trembling hands in his, "I want nothing but to take you home."

"*Take me home?*" She looked at him with dazed eyes. "you can't mean that you would have me at home again, you can't mean that."

"But I do mean that," he spoke very quietly, almost in a matter-of-fact voice, seeing her great agitation, "I have come on purpose to see—to see how soon you can travel, dear. I must nurse you back to health again."

The sick woman was sobbing, low, pitiful sobs.

"I didn't know there was such love in the world," she whispered, as Godfrey stooped and kissed her, "I didn't know anybody could forgive like this."

And a great restfulness came into her eyes; a wonderful peace upon her worn face.

"Oh! I will be good now, Godfrey, I will be good," she said. "Now you have forgiven me—I think God will forgive me too. But—I have spoilt your life and my own—I can never undo the past."

"We will put the past behind us and not look back at it again," he answered. "We will start afresh from to-day, my little wife, and go on together hand in hand. We love each other, and we will help each other, dear."

And when later on, Elsie Dangerfield told Sister Helen something of what her husband had said to her, the sister said softly:

"Oh, my dear, I think your husband's love for you is wonderful. Do you know those great words come back to me when I think of him and of you, 'Down on your knees and thank Heaven fasting, for a good man's love.'"

L. G. Moberly.

Draper's Assistant: "Can it be possible! Miss Coupon, whom I had the pleasure of meeting at Margate last summer? How long——" Miss Coupon: "Three yards, please."

Friend: "What did he say to you when he proposed?" **Miss Rox:** "He said life without me meant nothing." **Friend:** "He was sincere in that. That's just what his possessions amount to."

"By the way, Bishop, why is it that you always address your congregation as 'Brethren,' and never mention the women in your sermons?" "But, my dear madam, the one embraces the other." "Oh, but, Bishop, not in church!"

Husband: "The new cook makes everything too salt. It's terrible." **Wife:** "She can't help that, poor thing. It isn't her fault that her hands are big." **Husband:** "What earthly difference can that make?" **Wife:** "That shows how much you know about housekeeping. The cookery books always measure salt by the pinch."

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SERIAL STORY COMPETITION.

STILL ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO WIN ONE OF THE TEN HANDSOME GRAMOPHONES OFFERED.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

The picture on this page illustrates a certain sentence in this week's instalment of our powerful new serial "A Foe in the Family." All you have to do is to read the instalment carefully, and to write under the picture the sentence which you think is illustrated by the sketch. Ten splendid Gramophones will be awarded to readers whose correct solutions are posted to us soonest after the publication of this number of *Short Stories*.

Sentence: .....
.....
.....

Page .....
Column .....
Line .....

In order that all competitors shall have an equal chance of winning these handsome prizes, we have decided to distribute the Gramophones over the British Isles thus:

Two Gramophones will be won by readers living in the London postal district whose correct solutions are posted first.

Two Gramophones will be awarded to readers living within 100 miles of London.

Two to those English readers living over 100 miles from London.

Two to Scottish readers sending in correct solutions and two to those living in Ireland.

When you have found the sentence write it down in the space below the picture, together with the number of the page, the column, and the line. Then put your name and address in the space provided, cut out this page and post it to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Mark your envelope in the *top left corner* with the name of your postal town, and the time of posting, thus: MANCHESTER. 2.45 p.m. Then post it *at once*.

Name..... Address.....

"Yes," said Mabel, proudly, "when a young man kisses me I scream." "Mabel," said Reginald, with a sudden coldness, "why is it you are so often hoarse when I call on you?"

Husband: "Come, sit on my lap, my dear, as you did in our old courting days." Wife: "Well, I declare! I haven't received such an invitation for an age." Husband: "And—er—bring a needle and thread with you, my love."

She: "Now promise me, Ralph, that you won't go to drinking just because I have refused you." He (despondently): "Certainly not. I'll have to swear off for three months to get even on the flowers and things I've wasted on you."

Mrs. Grey: "That is such an affectionate couple over there. I heard him call her 'dear' several times as if he meant it." Mr. Grey (gruffly): "Of course he meant it. She has got a three hundred pound fur mantle on."

Mother: "What! crying, Ethel? Don't you and Herbert get along well?" Bride of Six Weeks: "Yes, we get along too well, mamma. I told Herbert the other day I was willing to do all the housework, and—and now he wants me to do it."

Wife: "I have a new maid coming to-day, dear." Husband: "Is she well recommended?" Wife: "Well, she has lived in seventeen of the highest families." Husband: "I should think that would be against her." Wife: "Not at all. What delicious scandals she must know."

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

Frances Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia Hamilton: Her companion.

FRANKIE PLAYS HER LAST CARD.

LIFE on board the yacht went very smoothly after a few days. There was some slight friction at first between Frankie and Mrs. Venables, relative to what that lady called "her kidnapping arrangement." But after a while the vivacious little woman settled down, and accepted the situation with a good grace. She seemed, indeed, to find a certain satisfaction in it.

"It's all very well, my dear," she informed me, "to have the reputation of a smart hostess, but, I assure you, it has drawbacks. Of course I felt vexed with your cousin at first; putting out to sea in such an unexpected fashion, more like pirates than anything else, upset me. But now it's quite delightful. I've wired to Vi, and she'll look after my guests and the house till I get back. Your dear cousin is charmingly romantic, Cynthia. It's quite an ideal arrangement to cruise about like this, 'the world forgetting,' and that sort of thing, don't you know."

I murmured an assent. I was too worried about Frankie to pay much heed to the little lady's prattle.

My cousin was looking well; there was not a shade of anxiety on her face or in her manner. She seemed resolved to make Lord Kinross more in love with her than ever, and had never been more winning or so gentle. Hartland appeared to idolise her, and would sit at her feet of an afternoon, with a rapt expression of countenance, watching her pale, sweet face, and murmuring irrelevancies in her ear.

The weather was perfect, not a cloud in the sky, nor a breaker in the sea. I could have been happy, quite happy, but for the haunting fear that never left me night or day—the fear that Frankie, despite all her beauty, all her wit, her courage, and her strength of will, would at the last moment fail to bring about her marriage.

But Frankie showed no sign of fear or doubt. Day after day went by; we would put in at some small fishing-port for fresh vegetables and provisions, explore the recesses of a deep caverned cave, or land in the boats at a sandy cove and have a gipsy tea. Otherwise we held no communication with the world; letters could not reach us—we were "at sea."

On one of our runs on shore I bought a society paper. I read therein, to my amazement, that Lord Kinross was cruising in the Mediterranean, and that his approaching marriage with the handsome Mrs. Norton would take place in Paris.

"Frankie, look here!" I cried.

My cousin nodded, taking the paper from me.

"Tear it up," she said, "I don't want Hartland to see the paragraph. I know all about it; I sent the notice myself."

"Why?"

"Don't you understand," she cried impatiently. "The paragraph will be copied by the other papers. Fluffy will be sure to catch sight of it somewhere, and——"

"He'll go to Paris?" I exclaimed.

"I hope so."

"And all the time you're going to be married at Cromer?"

Frankie shook her head. "Not if I can help it, Cynthia. You don't know Fluffy. He won't leave me a loophole of escape if he can help it. He will be prepared for me at Cromer and at Paris too. My only chance is to be married at a little out-of-the-way place that Fluffy's never heard of. And"—she paused—"be married quickly."

I glanced at her anxiously. We had been at sea just on a fortnight. We were, in fact, due at Cromer the end of the week—seven days before the date fixed for the wedding. Up to the present my cousin had not spoken to Hartland as to lengthening the cruise. She was, I thought, leaving it somewhat late. For the first time Frankie seemed to have lost her nerve.

That afternoon we sighted the Channel Islands. Frankie and Mrs. Venables grew quite enthusiastic over their beauties.

"Such a climate!" said the Venables woman.

"Such lovely walks," cried Frankie, "and such flowers! I believe Guernsey's a paradise of roses."

"It sounds promising," said Chesterton.

"It's perfect!" returned my cousin, her eyes sparkling. "What do you say, Hartland, shall we explore paradise?"

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"I'm quite willing to stay at Guernsey for a day or two, if that's what you mean, Frankie," said his lordship. Then, under cover of the wind, softly whispered, "If it will please you, dearest."

"That's settled, then," said my cousin brightly. "To-night we dine on shore."

"I'm willing," announced Chesterton, "and so is Cynthia. We always think alike," with which astounding statement he vainly tried to take my hand.

Nobody seemed to think it necessary to consult Mrs. Venables. But then she did not think it necessary herself. I felt much relieved at the arrangement. It seemed as if Frankie had made her first step towards defeating Fluffy!

I stood close beside my cousin watching the shores of the island growing more distinct.

Shortly after Kinross carried her off.

Together they paced the deck, until, fearing she would be tired, he placed her on a pile of cushions, throwing himself at her feet. The moon was rising over the water, we were drifting slowly, smoothly into the harbour. The whole world seemed at peace.

I knew my cousin was going to appeal to Hartland, and felt anxious, cruelly anxious, as to the result. I could not wait, I felt I must learn then and there whether or no she was successful. I lingered near them, hovering in the shadow.

"We've had a happy time, Hartland," said my cousin, "this last fortnight."

"The best and happiest in my life, sweetheart," he answered.

"You'll be sorry when it comes to an end?"

"Our cruise, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"Hardly. You see," he put his arms about her with an eager gesture—"you see, my darling, every day that brings our voyage nearer to a close, hastens the day when I shall have you for my own. My sweet, my love, the weeks have gone so slowly, the hours are leaden, each day lengthens itself to six. How can I sorrow that the time of waiting will so soon be over? How can I, tell me?" He took her in his arms and kissed her passionately—kissed her eyes, her throat, her hair, made glorious by the moon's soft light.

He loved her, surely he loved her! In face of such a love, he would, he must, forgive her everything. And yet?

I sighed and wrung my hands. Men are hard, hard and cold in judging the woman they love. Percival Hope had cared for me, I thought, but he had judged me.

But Kinross was softer, more gentle than Percival. What could Fluffy know of my cousin that her lover would not forgive? Percival had tried to prejudice him against her but in vain. Was it likely that Fluffy—*Fluffy!* how the name mocked the man—would succeed where Percival had failed?

And yet Frankie had defied Hope, had laughed at him. This other she could not defy. She feared him, feared him greatly.

Frankie's voice, low and thrilling, broke my thoughts.

"Would you weary of sailing the summer seas under the blue sky and the warm sun—just you and I, my dearest?" She threw her arms round his neck and gazed at him with those strange, those wonderful eyes.

"So you were with me, I should never weary," he answered readily, almost, I thought, too readily.

"I always loved the sea," she went on softly; "but never, I think, so much as now. Wild, restless, caressing, fierce, it appeals to me like some beautiful feline thing—I hate to think of crowds these days; people and fashions and functions seem to jar on me. Need we go back to Cromer just yet, Hartland? Let us snatch all we can of this free, this beautiful life."

"My dearest——" He paused, and seemed a little at a loss. Then—"It's quite delightful of you, Frankie, to like this quiet life. In fact, it's positively charming—and so unexpected. All the same, you know, the world, being as it is, I don't think we can keep out of it much longer. We're not in Arcadia, Frankie, and the notion of prolonging our cruise indefinitely, turning up for our marriage at the last moment, so to speak, doesn't commend itself to me. After we're married we'll sail the summer seas to all eternity—if it please you."

Frankie leant against him in the darkness.

"Hartland," she said softly, "don't you think a fashionable wedding's an awful bore? A nice quiet affair in a country village is much more to my taste. Say"—she held up her face for a kiss—"shall we be married in Guernsey, you and I?"

For a moment he hesitated. She was lovely enough to stir romance in any man, and the notion was romantic, not to say far-fetched. It might even be considered ridiculous by some. That decided him, of all things Lord Kinross dreaded ridicule.

"You're whimsical as the sea itself, Frankie," he said, with an uneasy little laugh.

"Don't you think it's a delightful idea?"

"Entirely; but—well, you see, there's a horrid lot of rules and regulations about licenses, and things. A man can't get married in a casual sort of way, you know, he's got to go through an immense deal of formality. Society expects it, Frankie, and Lady Linton, my aunt, you know, simply demands it. She would be furious, and——" He laughed. "A furious aunt I cannot bear with, even for you. We'll stay a day or two in Guernsey, till Monday if you like. And then—then we must set sail for Cromer."

He spoke with an air of determination. To combat his decision further would be useless. Frankie did not attempt to do so. She patted his coat-sleeve, and said, smiling, "You're terribly wise, Hartland."

"You're adorably foolish!" he retorted, and the matter ended.

That evening, as Frankie had determined, we dined on shore, at a delightfully quaint old inn, smothered with roses and wisteria.

During the next few days we had a happy, peaceful time. Frankie's fears lessened, she felt secure in Hartland's affection, sure of her own powers of fascination. Fluffy had made no sign; he was doubtless cruising the Mediterranean or searching Paris.

I was very sorry when our stay in Guernsey drew to a close, and so was Frankie. We were to start for Cromer early Monday morning. On Sunday evening Hartland proposed an expedition to an old abbey some miles inland.

"We'll drive there," he said, "and walk back in the moonlight."

Mrs. Venables decided the fatigue would be too great, so leaving her comfortably settled on the verandah the rest of us started in high spirits for the abbey.

It was a delightful drive, the country, a very wilderness of flowers, lay fresh and fair under the blue sky, while in the distance the white-crested waves dashed against the cliffs.

We had a meal at a farmhouse near the ruins, sweet-tasting bread, coffee and cream, with pears, apples and plums. Then just as the moon tipped the trees with light, we started on our homeward way.

Laughing and talking in light-hearted fashion, the time and distance passed quickly. As we neared the town we met a group of peasants, dark-eyed women in white caps, and pretty, fair-haired children. Hartland paused to distribute pence and smiles to the little ones; Frankie, half impatient at his delay, went on. I watched her, tall and slim, as she went up the hill that looks upon the little town. She reached the top and, for a moment, stood a solitary figure outlined against the moonlit sky. The next, someone, a man, had joined her. They stood together, his face was turned towards me.

I felt as though a cold hand gripped my heart. There in the moonlight, a smile upon his face, a greeting on his lips, stood—Fluffy!

For a moment Frankie could not speak, then, with an effort, she pulled herself together and shook hands with him. By this time we had all come up the hill. Kinross welcomed Fluffy warmly, and Chesterton seemed charmed to see him.

"Where have you come from?" said my cousin at last "It's delightful, but surprising, to stumble on you here."

"So long as you're pleased," he said softly, "what does it matter. Still, if you're curious, I've come on business. You're looking well, Mrs. Norton, and Miss Cynthia," he looked at me in his old, kindly fashion, "is quite blooming. When do you leave the island, Kinross?"

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"HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA," IS THE TITLE OF A NEW SERIES OF REMARKABLE SOCIETY STORIES WHICH COMMENCES IN "SHORT STORIES" ON NOV. 4TH.

"To-morrow morning early. And you?"

"My plans for the moment are unsettled."

"I shall hope to see you at Cromer, any way," said Kinross. "Thursday's the all-important day, you know."

"Your wedding is fixed for that date?" Fluffy asked.

Kinross nodded.

"I congratulate you." Fluffy smiled and offered Frankie his assistance down the hill. She laid her fingers lightly on his arm, and with wonderful self-possession commenced to ask how he was, what he had been doing, and if he had missed her very much.

Not once did she flinch or show a sign of fear, but throughout the evening she did not leave him. He had no chance, no opportunity to speak to Kinross.

At length he said he must go, he was stopping at a hotel at the other side of the town.

"I shall see you in the morning," he said to Kinross. "I'll look you up before you start."

"All right," said his lordship. "Remember, we leave at nine."

Fluffy waved an adieu and started quickly down the road.

"Cynthia," said my cousin, drawing me aside, "run after him *now*, at once. Give him this," she handed me a note, "and bring back the answer. *Run.*"

Obediently I hurried down the long white road. Fluffy heard me coming and turned to meet me.

"Frankie said I was to give you this," I panted.

He took the note and read it thoughtfully.

"What is the answer, please, I must make haste?"

For a moment he paused, then in a low voice said—"The answer, Cynthia, is 'yes'!"

Frankie hurried me up the stairs before she let me speak.

"He says 'yes!'" I announced breathlessly. "What does he mean, Frankie?"

My cousin faced me, a strange look in her eyes, a look which frightened me.

"It means that I shall win," she cried, "yes, I shall win. Listen, Cynthia," she came close to me and spoke rapidly. I'm going to meet Fluffy to-morrow morning at half-past six. I shall steal out of the hotel without anyone seeing me, but in case of inquiry you must say I'm sleeping here with you. Keep your door locked till I come back. Say I'm ill, or asleep, if anyone asks for me. You understand?" She tightly grasped my arm. "You mustn't fail me, it's the last thing I shall ask of you."

"You're going to see Fluffy, to try and persuade him——" She interrupted me.

"Yes," she said, "I'm going to *persuade* him," and she gave a horrid little laugh.

She left me then. I heard her footsteps down the passage, heard her softly enter her room and lock the door. Perhaps—I do not know—perhaps she slept that night; for me there was no sleep.

I feared, yet longed to meet the morning. The look in my cousin's eyes haunted me. The mockery of her laugh chilled me. She was going to meet Fluffy, to persuade him, to——. I shuddered and covered my face with my hands, a horrible fear at my heart. I waited, chilled, fearful for the dawn to break.

At six o'clock I heard those same soft steps outside my door. Frankie was going out. Should I go after her, beg and pray to accompany her? It would be useless! Frankie would tolerate no interference. Besides, what excuse should I make? What cause had I to fear? Nothing but a look in her eyes, a tone in her voice. And yet that vague, that horrible dread lay upon me like a nightmare. I tried to shake it off. I opened my window wide and drew in long breaths of the cool, morning air. I watched my cousin down the street, straining my eyes to follow her as she walked swiftly along the road that led over the hills towards an old stone quarry.

I wondered, was it at the quarry she was going to meet him?

Long after she had passed out of sight I gazed, until my eyes grew heavy and my head ached. I dropped upon the floor and rested my arms upon the window-sill. My head drooped, my eyes closed—I fell asleep.

A quick, sharp knock at the door aroused me. I sprang to my feet—the clock was on the stroke of eight.

"Open, Cynthia, quick, it is I," said a low voice.

Trembling I drew back the bolt and Frankie entered.

"You have seen him?" I asked. "What has happened, tell me?"

I bent towards her eagerly, but, as I met her gaze, I saw that in her face which brought a cry of terror to my lips.

"Where is he?" I screamed. "You've—you've——"

She thrust her hand over my mouth and forced me on the bed.

"You fool, you little fool. Be quiet—be quiet, I say."

"Tell me," I pleaded, thrusting her from me. "I will be quiet, indeed I will be quiet, but tell me what has happened."

"All that I wished," she answered quietly. "Fluffy will not get to Cromer in time to stop my wedding *now*."

"But how? Frankie, I must know, I will know." Something seemed to give me courage, I started to my feet and stood before her. "You've got to tell me," I said firmly.

She glanced at me curiously. "Fluffy will keep silence," she said, "does not that satisfy you?"

I shook my head. "Where is he?" I asked hoarsely.

"I don't know," she returned flippantly. "At the hotel, I suppose."

"*Frankie!*"

She turned upon me fiercely. "I'll have no more of this," she cried. "You are beside yourself. What has happened, indeed? What should happen? Anger and threats on his side, sweet words, promises, and flattery on mine. And as usual I proved the stronger. Get yourself dressed, child, and give me no more nonsense. I have told you too much of my affairs, it seems. Make haste, it is past eight already. We have to be on board the yacht at nine."

At this moment there came a knocking at the door.

"What has become of *you*, Cynthia?" chirped Mrs. Venables, "your cousin has quite disappeared, her room's empty."

With a warning look at me, Frankie, admitted the little woman.

"Cynthia's not well, poor child," said Frankie. "She's been ill all night, and couldn't sleep. She came to me quite early this morning, I've been with her ever since."

"She does look bad," said Mrs. Venables. "What is it, do you think?"

Frankie smiled, and laid her hand caressingly upon my arm.

"She can't bear the idea of parting from me, Mrs. Venables. The silly child positively dreads my marriage, it's making her quite ill. I tell her I shall always care for her the same, but she won't believe it. She's been crying half the night—look at her eyes."

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Venables, "what a silly thing to do. You may be getting married yourself before long. You shouldn't grudge your cousin her happiness."

"You mustn't scold her, Mrs. Venables." Frankie stooped and kissed me. "Dear little girl," she said.

Passively I let my cousin smooth my hair, arrange my dress, and lead me down to breakfast. As usual, she had proved too much for me, I was as wax in her hands.

I got through breakfast somehow, though it was a terrible ordeal. They were all very kind to me, and said how sorry they were I was not well. Hartland was especially nice—just like he used to be in the days when I first knew him.

"Mrs. Venables has been telling tales, Cynthia," he said softly. "What a silly little girl you are! Is it likely I should wish to part you from Frankie? I'm quite as fond of you as she is. You ought to be pleased to gain a nice-looking cousin like me."

I smiled feebly and forced some toast down my throat. I was in a state of terrible expectancy. Something, I felt, was going to happen.

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Breakfast over, we sauntered down to the quay, taking a last look of the town on our way.

"Fluffy's not turned up after all," said Kinross. "I suppose he's overslept himself."

"I'm sorry," said Frankie, "I should like to have seen him."

"He's sure to turn up at Cromer, anyway," remarked Kinross.

Frankie gave a start at the words; I gave a shudder.

Just as we were about to embark, Mrs. Venables discovered she had left her writing-case behind.

"It's most unfortunate," she cried. "I must go back for it at once. I could not possibly leave it in a strange hotel."

"They'll send it on all right," said Kinross. "I've left them our address in case of any letters coming. It will mean quite twenty minutes' delay if you go back. Can't you do without it, Mrs. Venables, the tide's just on the turn?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't," was the reply.

"Send a messenger." Kinross motioned to a group of loiterers on the quay.

"Thank you, I would rather go myself."

After that there seemed nothing more to say, and Mrs. Venables was about to start back to the hotel when Frankie interposed.

"You simply mustn't go," she said, "you'll tire yourself completely; and, what is more important, we shall miss the tide. Cynthia will be there and back in no time. She shall fetch the case. No," as Chesterton stepped forward to accompany me, "you're not to go with her, we shouldn't see either of you for an hour at least. Go, Cynthia, like a dear girl, and be as quick as possible."

I hurried back to the hotel, procured the writing case, and was making my way once more to the quay, when somebody shouted to me to stop. A young man came running towards me.

"There's been a bad accident," he said, "a gentleman staying at the Hotel Poulin has fallen down the quarry. He went out early this morning, and has only just now been discovered."

"Is he dead?" I asked, with white lips.

"No, but badly hurt. He is, I think, a friend of your party?"

"He is," I said. "I will go now and tell them. He must not be left among strangers."

I flew down to the quay. Come what would, poor Fluffy should not be left alone. Some of us, or all of us, must go back and look after him. Frankie was waiting for me in the boat, the others had already gone aboard the yacht.

She realised at once that I had news.

"You must come back," I cried distractedly. "Fluffy is hurt, dangerously hurt, dying perhaps."

For answer she tried to pull me in the boat. In my fright and agitation I missed my footing—the next moment I was in the sea. The sound of many waters in my ears, the sight of Frankie's face, white and set, before my eyes—I sank down, and down, and down.

I knew no more until I found myself in my berth on board the yacht. Frankie was beside me.

"You're not to speak, dearie," she said, watching my face. "Just drink this and go to sleep."

I pushed her hand aside, and sat up with eager, questioning eyes.

"It's all right, Cynthia," she said, with a soft smile. "There's nothing for you to worry about. Fluffy's much better; Chesterton went back and made inquiries. It wasn't a serious accident, after all. How did it happen? Why," she paused, and her hands opened and shut convulsively; "He walked too close to the edge of the quarry, I suppose; he must have been standing right on the edge, and—and he lost his balance," she said hoarsely, "and fell over."

"And you, where were you when he fell?"

"I?—I?" She laughed. "I was with my little cousin; with you Cynthia, dear."

"Frankie!" I sat bolt upright and clutched her arm, "it is not true," I said. "He did not fall; you—*you* pushed him over!"

(The last of this series containing the grand climax appears in next Tuesday's issue.)

Your Editor Chats.

It has been necessary, owing to an unlooked-for development in connection with the new series of articles—"How I Chaperoned Belinda"—to postpone publication for a week. In dealing with statements of the kind contained in the articles it is absolutely necessary that the greatest possible care should be taken to give offence to no one, and I am sure that in this matter readers will agree with me. The first article will be published in *Short Stories*, ready on Tuesday, November 4th, and the cover will bear a picture of Lady Peggy Carstairs (the author of the articles) and of Belinda North.

We have paid a large amount of money for the right to publish these articles, but we hope to get a good return by way of increased circulation. Those readers who think sufficiently well of the paper and appreciate it enough to help us, can do so by *simply buying one extra copy of the issue ready on Tuesday, November 4th, and giving that copy to a friend who might be interested.* The extra cost to you is only a penny, yet if you and your fellow-readers each bought an extra copy just for one week and gave it away to a friend, the circulation would be doubled.

Don't think to yourself—"Oh, well, if I don't buy an extra copy it won't make much difference; there are thousands of other people who will do so." If everyone who reads these lines thought the same no good would be done. Your arguments should rather be—"Anyway, whatever anybody else does, *I* will buy an extra copy for that particular week."

PERCIVAL HOPE.

I gather from letters received from readers that they do not consider Percival Hope a sufficiently interesting individual to justify my trying to obtain from him an account of his experiences. I shall, therefore, not trouble him in the matter.

AN APOLOGY.

Will those readers who applied for leaflets in connection with the new serial story, and who did not receive them, please accept my apologies for the disappointment. The truth of the matter is that, so numerous were the applications that the stock of leaflets was exhausted before all the applications were dealt with. I shall, however, communicate with these readers in the course of a few days

Your Editor.

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A REAL LOVE AND A FALSE.

The Tale of an Accident.

I WAS a coquette.

Many a lover's heart I had lacerated by refusing his offer of marriage, after I had lured him on to a "declaration."

My last victim's name was James Frazer. He was a tall, awkward, homely and ungainly man, but his heart was as true as steel. I respected him highly, and felt pained when I witnessed his anguish at my rejection of him.

But the fact was, I had myself fallen in love with Elliott Tracy, a smart City man, who had been unremitting in his devotion to me. James Frazer warned me against Elliott, but I charged him with jealousy, and took his warnings as an insult. A few days later Elliott and I were engaged, and my dream of romantic love seemed to be in a fair way towards realisation. I had a week of happiness. Many have not had so much in a lifetime. Many awake from the bright, short dream to find themselves in lifelong darkness, and bondage from which there is no escape. Thank God, I was not to be so miserable as they!

There was a party on horseback winding through our grand old woods and quiet country roads. Elliott and I led the cavalcade. I rode my own beautiful Brown Bess. Elliott was mounted on the handsome black horse that had been given to him by a rich uncle. Following us were a bevy of merry girls and their cavaliers, and among them, tall, awkward, and silent, rode James Frazer. His presence had marred all the pleasure of my ride, and I was glad to be in advance of them all, that I might not see him.

And so we rode on through the lovely country and I listened well pleased to the low but animated words of Elliott Tracy, who wished himself a knight, and me a fair ladye of the olden time, that he might go forth to do battle for me, and compel all men to recognise the claims of his peerless love.

Very eloquently he spoke the inspiration of love, of the brave deeds and perilous exploits it had prompted, wishing again and again that he might thus proclaim and maintain his love before the world. It pleased me to listen to this, and to believe it sincere, though I surely had no wish to put my lover to such a test.

Suddenly a shot rang through the still woods, and a wounded bird, darting past, fluttered and fell at the feet of Brown Bess. With a bound and a spring, that nearly unseated me, she was off.

Struggling to regain my seat, I had no power to restrain her, and even as she flew the fear and madness of the moment grew upon her. I could only cling breathlessly to mane and bridle and wonder helplessly where this mad gallop was to end. She swerved from a passing waggon, and turned into a cart track that led to the river. In the sudden movement the reins had been torn from my hands, and I could not regain them.

I clung to the mane, and closed my eyes that I might not behold the fate that awaited me. How sweet was life in those precious moments which I thought my last! How all its joys, its affections, its last crowning love rose up before me! I thought of the pang that would rend Elliott's heart as he saw me lying mangled and dead, and then the thought would come that he was pursuing and trying to save me, even, as he had said, at the risk of life and limb.

I remembered no more. I felt a sudden shock, a fearful rushing through the air, and knew nothing until, days afterwards, I woke to a faint, weak semblance of life, in my room at home.

I never saw Elliott Tracy again. The last words I ever heard from his lips were those of knightly daring. The last act of his life, in connection with mine, was to follow in the train of frightened youths who rode after me, to contemplate the disaster from afar, and as soon as he saw me lifted from the shallow bed of the river into which I had been thrown when my frightened horse stopped suddenly on its bank, to ride hastily back to the village. That evening he sent to make inquiries, and learning that I was severely but it was hoped not fatally injured, he thenceforth contented himself with such tidings of my condition and improvement as could be gained from village rumours.

At last it was known that I would never recover entirely from the effects of my injury, and that very day Elliott Tracy departed suddenly from the village.

He made no attempt to see me, nor sent me any farewell. When I was once more about, and beginning to learn the lesson of patience and resignation that awaited me, I received a letter from him, in which he merely said that he presumed my own judgment had taught me that, in my altered circumstances, our engagement must be at an end; but to satisfy his own sense of honour (his honour?) he wrote to say that, while entertaining the highest respect for me, he desired a formal renunciation of my claim.

Writing at the bottom of this letter, "Let it be as you wish," I returned it to him at once, and thus ended my brief dream of a romantic love.

I had heard ere this of Elliott Tracy's cowardly conduct on that day, and now I first bethought me to inquire who had rescued me from imminent death.

Then I learnt that James Frazer, his arm already broken by the jerk with which Brown Bess tore away from him as he caught at her bridle, had ridden after me, and was the first to lift me from the water.

Many times daily he had made inquiries for me. His had been the hand that sent the rare flowers that decked my room. His were the books I read in the lingering days of convalescence, and his, now, was the arm that supported me as, slowly and painfully, I paced the garden walks.

I have been his wife for many a year. I have forgotten that he is not handsome, or rather he is beautiful to me, because I see his grand and lovely spirit shining through his plain features, and animating his awkward figure.

I have long since laid aside, as utterly untenable, my pet theory that beautiful spirits dwell only in lovely bodies.

It may be a providential compensation that, in denying physical perfection, the soul is not dwarfed or distorted, but shines the brighter that it is not marred by petty vanity or love of the world's praise.

E. Ashton.

Mr. Younghusband (reading from paper): "'Married—Blanche de Smythe to Walter Wellington Jones.' What old memories that name awakens!" Mrs. Y. (blushing): "I never imagined you knew of my engagement to Walter." Mr. Y. (chillingly): "I was alluding to Blanche."

He: "My dear cousin, I assure you I would never dare rob those sweet lips of a kiss." She: "Oh, you hypocrite! Didn't you make an attempt of that character the other day?" He: "Never. Far from having any intention of robbing you of a kiss, I was trying to give you one."

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The Diplomacy of Sir Dennis.

"What is the matter *now*?"

Sir Dennis Hawtrey laid down his book, and gazed with mild exasperation at the excited, tearful woman who had just burst into his study. The most peace-loving and easy-going of men, his hard fate had bestowed on him a restless, excitable, nervous wife, who did her best to worry his life out with constant petty grievances.

"It's Hilda," she exclaimed. "To think I have but the one child, and she such a trial, wilful, perverse, idiotic——"

"Compose yourself, my love," gently interposed Sir Dennis. "Your voice is rising to a scream. Pray don't prance about the room. Sit down quietly and tell me what is wrong. Some trifle, as usual, I suppose."

Lady Hawtrey gave a hysterical laugh, and coming to a halt opposite her husband, gasped out, in a voice intended to be calmly ironical, "Oh, yes, a mere trifle. Hilda has just informed me that she is engaged to, and means to marry, a man in a bicycle shop." Then she paused for the expected explosion. None came. Sir Dennis took off his glasses, rubbed them carefully, settled them once more upon his nose, looked placidly at his wife, and uttered a very unemotional "Dear me."

"Is *that* all you say?" cried Lady Hawtrey. "Hilda! not yet introduced—scarcely eighteen—our only child and heiress—proposes to marry a young man who teaches in a bicycle school, and all you say is, 'dear me.'"

"What did *you* say?" quietly asked Sir Dennis.

"I told her she was a silly child, and I should send her to a strict school at once, unless she promised to be more sensible. I forbade her to dream of such a thing, or ever to speak to the man again. But she is in open rebellion, says her life's happiness is at stake, and no one shall come between her and her choice. For once you must exert your authority, and act as her father and the head of the family."

"I will," responded Sir Dennis, rather to his wife's surprise. "I have always known the time would come when I should be obliged to take the reins altogether out of your hands, and drive the coach myself. That time has now come." Sir Dennis rose to his feet, and his gentle, weary voice took a commanding ring which was as new as it was disagreeable to his wife. "I forbid you—I repeat, I *forbid* you to say one harsh word to Hilda, or to have anything whatever to do with this affair. Leave it entirely to me. *I* will take Hilda in hand."

Lady Hawtrey had always considered her husband a weak, indolent man, who allowed her to govern partly because it saved him trouble, and partly because he recognised in her his superior. This latter idea she now feared was a mistake.

Hilda proved difficult to manage. She had her father's surface pliability with a strong will underneath. Like her father, she never wasted time or strength in argument. She now simply stated that she had fallen in love with Leonard Chandler, and intended to marry him, with or without her parents' consent.

"I have not refused my consent," her father observed. "Your happiness is my first object, and if marriage with this young man will secure it, I will certainly not put any obstacle in your way. Have you considered that the young man is not in your own rank of life?"

Hilda had considered it, but was no believer in rank. Leonard was quite as much of a gentleman as any of the men she had met; indeed, his manners were superior in suavity and courtly grace even to her father's. The distinctions of rank were now obsolete. One peer was a coal merchant, a countess had a shop, a tea-dealer was a baronet, and on quite intimate terms with royalty.

"There is much in what you say, Hilda," replied her father thoughtfully, "and I daresay your mother's prejudices are foolish. Best not discuss the matter with her. Write to Mr. Chandler, asking him to call on me to-morrow afternoon. Meantime, say no more to your mother on the subject."

Lady Hawtrey suffered agonies next day. Scold Hilda or nag her husband she dared not, keep her anger to herself she could not, so she found a safety valve in writing long letters to her dearest friends, hinting at terrible events about to take place in the family. She was thus occupied when her husband strolled into her boudoir, and sat down, remarking casually, "I've just seen young Chandler—Hilda's future husband—you know."

"What, has he *dared* to approach you?" Lady Hawtrey was beginning, when Sir Dennis interrupted her.

"Florence, if you cannot discuss this matter calmly, I shall not discuss it with you at all. Yes, I know you're her mother and all the rest of it," he added, anticipating the flood of words about to issue from her protesting mouth, "but you are also a tactless and indiscreet woman, and this is a matter which will want the nicest management, the keenest diplomacy to avert disaster. Hilda is difficult to manage, and if you interfere, you'll ruin everything."

Lady Hawtrey gave an indignant snort, but her husband went ruthlessly on: "This fellow is wonderfully handsome, well-educated, and gentlemanly. I don't altogether wonder that a romantic child like Hilda should idealise him into a fairy-prince, but if she's pulled up too sharply, she'll bolt. Chandler's father had a general shop, which the widow carries on, and they are well-to-do people for their station, but of course the lad knows he might as well propose for a royal princess as for Hilda. He spoke quite sensibly, and I could not help seeing that Hilda had—well, made the running, so to speak. He owns it's absurd on the face of it, but he says Hilda loves him, and he won't fail her, which of course means if she wants to run away with him, he's ready."

"Can't you buy him off?" burst in Lady Hawtrey. Her husband shook his head.

"No," he said placidly. "I shan't try. I've given my consent."

Lady Hawtrey gave a yell of dismay.

"Please don't make that disagreeable noise. Hang it all, Florence, you don't suppose I want a grocer's son in the family. Now, look here, I pointed out to him that his present position in life was undesirable, and offered to assist him to a better one."

Lady Hawtrey clasped her hands, and raised her eyes in mute appeal to Heaven.

"And, if he does well," continued Sir Dennis imperturbably, "the marriage will take place next summer—provided Hilda has not changed her mind."

"Changed her mind? *Hilda?* Why, she's as obstinate as a mule—or yourself."

"Precisely, and if I put this folly down with a strong hand, there's no knowing what she may do. As it is, I've been so kind, so fatherly, so sympathetic, that they are both on honour to do nothing underhand. Chandler is to be received here, and I must ask you to be gracious to him—civil, at least. No doubt Hilda has confided to him your opinion of the matter, so he won't expect much."

The suggestion of a trip to the Paris Exhibition, which her father made a week later, and which would have delighted her in other circumstances, brought a mutinous little frown to Hilda's brow.

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"I don't want to leave Leonard," she said, looking defiantly from her mother's compressed lips and flashing eyes to her father's bland countenance. "And I am going to pay a visit this afternoon to Mrs. Chandler. She sent me a kind message by Leonard, saying she never paid visits—I suppose her health is not good—but hoped I would come and see her. And I shall."

"Quite right, my dear," cordially responded Sir Dennis. "And we can put off the Paris trip till you feel inclined for it, so you need not leave Leonard yet awhile."

"You shall *not* go and visit that woman," burst in Lady Hawtrey, looking dangerous.

"Nonsense, my love, why should not Hilda visit her future relatives?" mildly inquired Sir Dennis. "I will take you there this afternoon, Hilda, if you like."

"Oh, thank you, father; I shall like that!"

"We won't have the carriage, but go on the top of a 'bus, and I'll leave you at the door, and send the carriage for you later. Go and get ready now, dear," he added, as his wife began a furious tirade, addressed partly to Hilda and partly to himself. "Don't interfere, Florence!" he continued, as the door closed behind their daughter. "This visit will be the first shock to Hilda's illusions. The child hasn't an idea where or how these people live. She thinks they have a place like Harrods' Stores, and a private house somewhere. I've been to the shop. It's a mean little place in a dirty back street, and Mrs. Chandler matches it. Whether the mother and sisters are servile or familiar, they'll equally disgust Hilda. I've seen them."

Hilda reappeared, a dainty little figure in her simple but stylish costume, and father and daughter started off together. Hilda always enjoyed her father's society, and this afternoon he was more fascinating than ever, so it was not until they had alighted from the 'bus, and walked some little distance that she noticed her surroundings.

"This isn't at all a nice street!" she observed, looking round her with marked disfavour. Her father made no rejoinder, but chatted gaily on for another ten minutes, when he stopped before a small provision shop, with the remark, "Here we are, my dear!"

Hilda looked at the shop, and then at her father.

"*This?* This—it—it *can't* be!" she faltered.

"Yes, dear, it is. There's the name above the door. I see there's no private entrance, so you must go in through the shop. You had better invite the family to dinner. Settle it with Mrs. Chandler, and your mother shall fix a day. Good-bye, dear, the carriage will call for you in about an hour."

Lifting his hat, he walked airily away, leaving his daughter standing transfixed at the shop entrance, a strong perfume of onion, cheese and pickles, saluting her nostrils. As she entered the shop, there issued from the room beyond it a portly, very handsome woman, who came forward, wiping her mouth with her apron, and inquiring, "What might you please to want, miss?"

"I want to see Mrs. Chandler."

"That's me, miss," returned the woman, with a smile which gave her an appalling resemblance to her son.

"I'm—I'm—Hilda—Hilda Hawtrey!" faltered the girl, and her future mother-in-law instantly plunged round the counter at her, folded her in a warm, fat embrace, and said in a voice to match, "You're welcome, my dear, heartily welcome. Come into the parlour, and make acquaintance with the rest of us."

It was five o'clock, and the Chandler family had just sat down to tea, which with them was the chief meal of the day. The 'round table was laden with hot buttered toast, tea-cake, shrimps, ham, watercress, radish, and other good things.

"This is Hildar," said Mrs. Chandler, introducing her young visitor—"Leonard's young lady. These are my girls, dear, Beatrice, Adar, and Maud, and this is my youngest boy, Albert."

The girls, plain likenesses of Leonard, welcomed Hilda with warmth, and rather greasy kisses; Albert, a common-looking lad of eighteen, with a shrimpy, but cordial handshake

"Ain't this comfortable?" beamed Mrs. Chandler, in front of her stout brown tea-pot. "Here's your tea, dear. Pass the cake, Albert. And how's your mar, dear?"

"Very well, thank you," said Hilda mechanically.

"Leonard tells us she's against the match," pursued honest Mrs. Chandler, who was as worthy an old soul as ever served behind the counter, or went every Sunday to chapel; "and, you know, my dear, we can't wonder for you are far above us, though Leonard is a good, well-principled lad, which is better than gold. But our stations is very different, I know."

"Lor', mar!" cried the eldest girl, "how you do go on. Love levels all ranks, we know, and Hildar's got a young gentleman to be proud of. Adar's young gentleman is quite a toff—a clerk in a very big place of business, but he don't look down upon Adar because her mar's in a very small way."

"Well, now, Beatrice, that's quite different," replied the mother. "Trade is trade, whether large or small, but Hildar here is in quite a different spear. She is an aristocrat."

"'The rank is but a guinea stamp a man's a man for a' that!'" suddenly spouted Albert, so unexpectedly that Hilda, who sat next him, quite jumped.

"Yes, and Miss Evans, my teacher at school," chimed in Maud, a pert, plain girl of about fourteen, "says that distinctions of rank are quite obsolete now. It's only education that counts nowadays. An educated chimney sweep is the equal of a duke, Miss Evans says."

"Then Miss Evans is a fool!" broke in Ada, sharply. "Fancy a chimney sweep being my equal! No, but a lady *is* a lady; you can't be more than that. I'm a lady, and Hildar's a lady, so it's ridiculous to say we ain't equals!"

"I wish you'd stop talking nonsense, and leave this poor child in peace!" said the mother, whom Hilda regarded as the only person of common sense in the party. "Can't you find something pleasanter to talk about than Miss Evans and her silly ideas? Leonard will be home soon, now, dear," she added kindly to Hilda, "and then you shall have the best parlour to yourselves for a bit. You'll want to do some spooning, *I* know."

Hilda murmured something inarticulate, and the conversation went on round her full of jokes and allusions which were Greek to the girl from another world.

"I'm going to have a new dress, Hildar!" Beatrice suddenly called out. "Can you tell me what is being worn most just now?"

"This, I believe," faltered Hilda, indicating her own dress. Beatrice threw a scornful glance at her.

"That? Why, I call that downright dowdy!" she cried, and plunged into a discussion with her sisters upon the prevailing fashions. Hilda felt as if in a nightmare. How came she in this stuffy shop-parlour, with these common, vulgar girls, this underbred lad, this kind, but terribly cook-like old woman? Could she ever marry the son and brother of these people? The mere idea of ever meeting them again made her shiver, and she hailed the sound of carriage-wheels as a shipwrecked mariner might hail the sight of a sail.

It was a very meek, dejected little Hilda who entered her parents' presence an hour later, and went swiftly up to her father.

"Take me away, father," she said, in a low, repressed tone, "to Paris—anywhere. Say what you like to Leonard Chandler, only never let me see him or hear his name again. Promise me I shall not!"

And Sir Dennis carefully kept all signs of joy or triumph from face and voice as he gave the desired assurance.

Vera Serkoff.

"How I Chaperoned Belinda."

This is the title of a remarkable series of true Society stories, which commences in *Short Stories* on Tuesday, November 4th.

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A Cooking Secret.

Mr. E. Conomie: "Did you write to that man who advertises to show people how to make puddings without milk, and have them richer?" Mrs. E. Conomie: "Yes, and sent him the shilling." "What did he reply?" "Use cream."

He Found Her Dear too.

"Old fellow, I'm engaged to Miss Dashe. She's a dear girl." "She is so. She cost me about £100 the time I was engaged to her."

The Modern Engagement.

Young Man: "May I present myself as a suitor for your hand?" Maiden: "I am sorry to disappoint you, but the fact is, I betrothed myself to-day to another." Young Man: "Well, what about to-morrow?"

A Protection against Thieves.

A.: "Why, man, all your shop-girls are squint-eyed! Can't you manage to obtain a prettier set?" B.: "I have got these as a protection against shop-lifters. The scamps will never know where the girls are looking!"

A Case of Heredity.

Bertha: "Sometimes you appear really manly, and sometimes you are absolutely effeminate. How do you account for it?" Harold: "I suppose it is hereditary. Half my ancestors were males and the other half females."

Quite Unfair.

Mrs. Potts: "Just to think of you talking to me in such a style. You used to vow I was an angel." Mr. Potts: "Look here, my dear, that isn't fair; you know it isn't. What is the use of twitting a man about the lies he told fifteen years ago?"

A Pleasant Task.

He: "My dear Miss Golding, I should love to assist you in performing all the tasks that fall to your lot." She: "Oh, I have no tasks. I've nothing to do but sit and hold my hands." He: "Well, I should like to assist you in doing even that much."

A Difference of Years.

Miss Fourthseason: "Mr. Fledgely proposed to me last night." Miss Stinger: "Did you accept him?" Miss Fourthseason: "No, he is so young, I promised to wait a few years, however." Miss Stinger: "So nice of you, dear! He is younger than you, of course, now, but in a year or two he won't be."

Not even Cracked.

Clare was perched upon the fence-post, swinging her chubby legs and singing at the top of her sound little lungs. "Be careful, Clare," said I, as I passed; "you might fall and break your bones. I'm afraid you'll get hurt." "Oh, don't be 'fraid," she answered, reassuringly; "I did fall yesterday, and I never even cracked."

A Pleasure Lost.

Ethel: "What are you so angry about to-night?" Maud: "I've received a note from Jack saying that he's engaged to Clara Beachly." Ethel: "Well, I should think that would relieve your mind rather than make you angry. You were engaged to Tom Shore and intended to throw Jack over." Maud: "Yes, goosey, but do you think I wanted to lose the fun of throwing him over?"

What He Found.

Mr. Crossly: "I tell you before I go that I want beer for dinner, and when I get home what do I find?" Mrs. Crossly: "Fault, every time."

An Artful Miss.

She: "If you should attempt to kiss me I would call mamma." He: "And what would happen then?" She: "Oh, nothing, for mamma isn't at home."

Answered.

He: "If I should ask you to marry me, what would you say?" She: "Guess." He: "Well—er—what would it rhyme with?" She: "Guess."

Hope for Him.

He: "I shall never marry until I meet a woman who is my direct opposite." She (encouragingly): "Well, Mr. Duffer, there are numbers of intelligent girls in this neighbourhood."

How He Knew.

Arthur: "That's a newly married couple. He is always stepping on her dress." Bert: "What does that prove?" Arthur: "After he has been married some time, and found out what a dress costs, he will be more careful."

That Young Brother Again.

Little Johnny: "I'd a good deal rather have you callin' on sister than Mr. Nicefellow." Sister's Admirer (delighted): "Would you? Why?" Little Johnny: "'Cause whenever Mr. Nicefellow calls he stuffs up the keyhole."

No Need for Worry.

Mr. Nuwed (gloomily): "My salary has been cut down ten per cent." Mrs. Nuwed (cheerily): "Oh! don't worry about that, dear. Silk, Ribbon and Co. are advertising perfectly lovely things at a reduction of twenty per cent."

A Large Order.

Happy Bridegroom: "Waiter, I want a dinner for two." Waiter: "Vil ze lady and gentleman haf *table d'hôte* or *à la carte?*" Happy Bridegroom (generous to a fault, but weak in French): "Bring us some of both, and put lots of gravy on 'em."

Needed Lots of Support.

Father (sternly): "That is all very well, young man, but can you support my daughter?" Son-in-law: "Oh, yes, fairly well—that is to say, I can support her for an hour or two, but I begin to get tired after that. She's thundering heavy, you know."

But the Donkey didn't See it.

She: "You know, Reggie, that girls are being called by the names of the flowers now, and my sister suggested that I should be called Thistle." Reggie: "Oh, yes, I see; because you are so sharp?" She: "Oh, no; she said it was because a donkey loved me."

Pronunciation.

"George," said a girl the other night, "here's a piece in the paper headed 'Kismet.' What does Kismet mean?" "The word must be pronounced with the 't' silent, Nettie," replied George. "Why, that would be 'Kiss me,'" said Nettie. "With the greatest pleasure," replied George. And he did.

A Reformation Quelled.

"Look here," said the reforming husband, "we must have things arranged in this house so that we shall know just where everything is kept." "With all my heart," sweetly answered his wife, "and let us begin with your late hours, my love. I should dearly love to know where they are kept." He lets things run on as usual.

Her Code of Signals.

Caller: "Why are you waving your handkerchief so wildly?" Murilla: "Since papa has forbiddlen Jack the house we have arranged a code of signals." Caller: "What is it?" Murilla: "When he waves his handkerchief five times that means, 'Do you love me?' and when I wave frantically in reply it means, 'Yes, darling.'"

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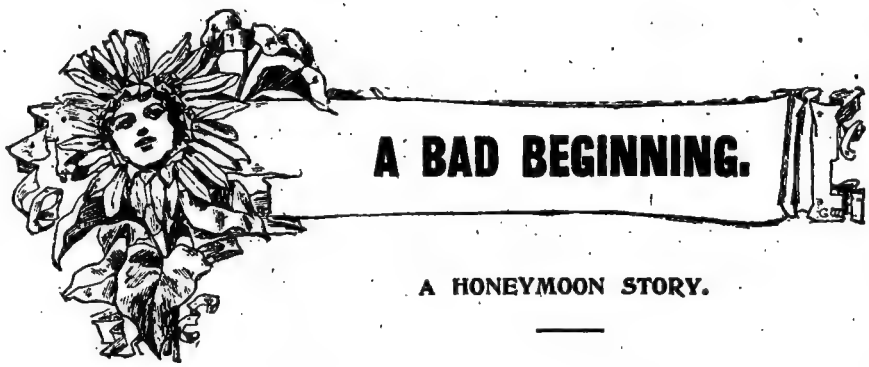

A BAD BEGINNING.

A HONEYMOON STORY.

"You'll be good to her, Spencer?"

"Good to Dora? Could I be anything else?"

"Yes, my dear boy, I believe you will, but you must forgive if a mother's feelings get the better of her on such an occasion as this, when her daughter—her only child—is going across the sea out of her sight."

"Of course! I quite understand. But look over there at Dora, saying good-bye to her bridesmaids; she doesn't look as if she had any fear for the future, does she?"

"No, I suppose she doesn't; and if she believes in you, so will I!"

"That's more like it," said Spencer Braithwaite, who, to tell the truth, was disposed to look upon his newly-acquired mother-in-law as a bit of a bore. "Dora and I will get along all right, for though I'd far rather live for her, I'd willingly die for her, if it would do her any good."

Spencer Braithwaite and Dora Drew had that morning been joined in the holy bonds of matrimony, and as the bridegroom's business interests demanded his immediate presence in Johannesburg, the happy pair had decided to regard the voyage to Cape Town in the light of a honeymoon.

Mrs. Drew, the four bridesmaids, and one or two personal friends of the bridegroom, had accompanied the couple to Southampton, whence the *Walmer Castle* was to sail at four o'clock.

Dora was one of those fragile little creatures, such as Dickens has made David Copperfield's first love. She adored her husband, mainly because he plainly let her see that he knew of her craving for the protection of a strong heart and arm, and would never let her lack it.

But it must be confessed that Spencer Braithwaite's claim to the possession of such strength, was, to say the least, problematical. He was—and he knew it—a highly nervous man, a man who, place him in a false position, would inevitably lose his head.

So long as he was a bachelor, this did not matter much; but with a wife to look after, who found it more than difficult to look after herself, there was evidently trouble in store for him.

The moment came for parting. "Strangers for the shore," sounded from end to end of the big liner, and the bridesmaids and Mrs. Drew only waited for the bridegroom's friends, who were having a "farewell" symposium in the saloon.

This was Dora's first experience of an ocean voyage, and it must be admitted that she looked forward to it with a certain amount of dread. Spencer did his best to allay her fears, and so far succeeded as to prevail upon her to keep the deck and watch the scenery.

He himself felt inclined for an adjournment to the smoke-room, for a restful cigar after the labours of the day.

She was disposed to be a little tearful at his implied desertion of her, but on his promise of a return after his first "weed," surrendered at discretion, and sought consolation in Marie Corelli's latest.

The trip was absolutely uneventful until Madeira was reached.

It is not usual for the African liners to stay long off the island, but, by a trick of fate, an accident to the screw shaft necessitated anchoring, and a delay of twelve hours or more.

"Will you come ashore for an hour or two, darling?" said Spencer.

"Oh, no, no!" replied Dora, with a pretty shriek. "I wouldn't go in one of those horrid little boats for anything, and I hope you won't, Spencer!"

"My darling! I don't want to cause you any anxiety on my account; but I've promised the doctor, and Captain Maskell (one of the passengers), to go and explore Funchal. Why won't you come? The boat is quite safe."

"It is very unkind of you to leave me, Spencer. How am I to know but that you may be stabbed, or something, by one of those dreadful-looking Portuguese!"

"Nonsense, my love! The boatmen are as harmless as—as I am."

"Well, I shall not have a minute's peace till you return, and I will not speak another word to Captain Maskell for the rest of the voyage."

It *was*, of course, very unkind of him, in his character of newly-married man, but what would you do? A bestowal of her in a cosy corner, a kiss, and a solemn declaration that he would be at her side again before she had finished half-a-dozen chapters of Marie Corelli, and he left her for the shore, fully intending to more than make up to her for the seeming neglect.

Except in the case of a stranger, there is not much to be seen in Funchal, therefore Spencer Braithwaite had but poor excuse for his dereliction from matrimonial duty. He knew it well, having often touched at Madeira in the course of his South African trips. During the late war, these expeditions had been suspended, so that he was glad to renew his acquaintance with the members of the British Club in Funchal.

Had this been all, everything would have been well.

"Ah, Braithwaite, glad to see you! Where have you been this age, old chap?"

Thus Arthur Ponsonby, Acting British-Consul, and an old friend of our new bridegroom.

A bottle of champagne; a brief explanation; and, on the announcement of the late wedding, profuse congratulations.

"Never thought you a marrying man, Braithwaite. Why didn't you bring Mrs. B. ashore with you?"

"She's nervous; very. Never been on the sea before; and she's frightened at the natives."

"That's bad; but I say, old fellow, do you remember the Señora?"

"The Señora? Oh, yes. She's married again, I suppose, by this time."

"Not a bit of it! Here, I'll tell you something. Do you know she's waiting for you. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"Don't be idiotic, Ponsonby! Waiting for me. Why, what would Mrs. Braithwaite say if she heard you?"

"Oh! I expect you would have a sultry quarter of an hour, my boy! But seriously, old chap, she has delayed her return to Madrid, solely because of you."

"But it's too absurd."

"Would you like to see her?"

"Not for worlds!"

"Well, you saw me give that message to the waiter just after you came in, didn't you? I'm very sorry, but had I known of Mrs. Braithwaite's existence I wouldn't have done it—I really wouldn't!"

"What on earth do you mean?" queried Spencer, in a fever of apprehension.

"Why, I sent to tell her you were here."

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"You did?"

"Yes, and you may bet that, before many more minutes, she will be at the door inquiring for you."

Spencer Braithwaite was a fairly brave man, as men go; but this information completely took every ounce of spirit out of him.

"I haven't a minute to spare!" he gasped, as he consulted his watch. "I must get back to the ship!"

"But you have to wait here for the doctor, and your military friend!"

"I can't wait. I shall get on board at once! Why, that horrible Spanish woman would seize me and marry me in spite of myself! And what would become of—of Mrs. Braithwaite?"

"Very well, then, aboard it is. I'll come down to the landing-place, and see you safe on board the lugger."

In less than five minutes, the almost demented Braithwaite and his friend were within sight of the anchored liner.

"There's a boat pulling shorewards," said Ponsonby. "The passenger won't have much time ashore, I'm thinking."

Spencer was too occupied with his own affairs to worry about other folks, and never rested till he was safe in a boat and on his way to the *Walmer Castle*.

Springing up the side, the first thing he heard was the hoarse order to "up anchor."

"You're only just in time," said the doctor, who met him as he stepped on deck.

"Why, how long have you been aboard?" asked the bewildered Spencer.

"Half-an-hour; the repair has been done sooner than was expected, and I was signalled for. I hadn't time to let you know; in fact, thought your friend the Consul would tell you."

"Oh, well it doesn't matter, so long as I've caught her!"

"Caught her? Oh, the ship! I thought you meant Mrs. Braithwaite."

"Mrs. Braithwaite?"

"Yes. Don't you know?"

"Know what, in Heaven's name?"

"Why, that Mrs. Braithwaite, out of her mind almost because you did not seem likely to be back before the ship sailed, took a boat which happened to be alongside, and——"

"Yes! Yes!"

"Went ashore after you."

Spencer Braithwaite sank down on the nearest deck-chair, and for a space was speechless. When he could collect himself a bit it was to find that the *Walmer Castle* was leaving Madeira well behind at the rate of a good sixteen knots an hour.

The Captain and the doctor tried their best to comfort him, assuring him that his wife would without doubt seek the Consul's aid to get sent on by the next steamer, which would be in a few days.

"But she's like a child!" groaned the wretched husband, "she has no more idea of getting on without me than a baby."

"Oh, come, come!" said the skipper. "Mrs. Braithwaite will pull through all night."

"You'll get a cable from her as soon as we make Simon's Bay, depend upon it."

He was obliged to be content with this cold consolation, and could only pray that Ponsonby, if, as she probably would, she applied to him for assistance in her extremity, would not drop a whisper even of Señora Ajanda.

Possessing his soul, therefore, with the best patience he could until they were in sight of Table Mountain, Spencer stood fixed by the gangway watching the snorting little steam pinnace making its way to the steamer with letters and news.

He was the first to speak to the official as he touched the deck.

"My name's Braithwaite—Spencer Braithwaite—have you a cable message for me?"

"One moment, sir, please; if you'll come to the saloon, I'll see."

Hardly able to control himself, Spencer followed the speaker to the saloon, and waited.

"Yes, sir, a cable message, as you say," handing it to the eagerly expectant man.

Tearing it open, he read that which turned him into stone.

"*Am staying with the Señora Ajanda till next steamer sails. You are a bad man. My heart is nearly broken.*"

"I'll kill Ponsonby!" were his first words when he came to himself.

She knew it all! His former flirtation with the Señora! But what could the two be concocting together? He felt his brain would go, if he thought much more about it.

* * * * *

It was a wreck of a man that wandered restlessly about the quay at Cape Town on the day when the next boat was expected.

Every suspicion of smoke in the distance made him shake as with ague.

He was in the dark with regard to much, but knew quite enough to cause him to fear the worst.

Should he go out to meet the steamer? Yes, he would, and as at that moment she was signalled, he made arrangements with the harbour-master, an old friend, to allow him to go in the medical officer's boat, which was then getting up steam.

How he made that journey he doesn't know to this day. He only knows that, when within hail of the liner, he saw by the rail on the hurricane deck a little face, and a little hand waving a tiny pocket handkerchief, that he felt, somehow, that hope was not quite dead for him.

"Spencer! I'm up here!" cried a joyous little voice, as he sprang on the deck.

Up the companion he tore, and, oblivious of passengers and deck-hands, received into his arms his Dora.

"But I know why you were so long gone," she said, with a mock frown, and pushing him away from her.

"You know?"

"Yes, the Señora told me."

"The Señora told you."

"Yes. You sent to say you had arrived for an hour, and would like to see her."

"I will certainly kill Ponsonby," muttered Spencer.

"And"—here she glanced mischievously at him—"I am not surprised, for I think she is about the very nicest woman I ever met in my life."

At this moment the Señora came up.

"Señor Braithwaite," she said, holding out her hand, "I only made this journey in order to see your little wife safe into your hands. But I am very glad to see *you*."

He didn't know what to say, beyond pressing the Señora to come and pass a week with them in Cape Town before they started for Johannesburg.

"No, no! I go back to-morrow by the *Walmer Castle*, to Madeira first, and then to Spain. You two will have much to talk about and to explain."

They could not persuade her, and were bound, on the whole, to admit that she was right.

"You must never be so foolish again, darling," he said after dinner that evening.

"Well, I don't think it was exactly foolish, dear," she answered him, "because if I had not been left behind you would, and then——"

"Well?"

"I should never have known the Señora."

Ralph Enderby.

Mrs. Wickwire: "From the happy expression you had when Mrs. Potts was singing one might imagine that you enjoyed that sort of thing. You don't break out into happy smiles over my singing." Mr. Wickwire: "I wasn't smiling over her singing. I was just thinking how lucky I was that she belonged to Potts instead of myself."

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The . . . Plan that Went Agley.

An Old-World Story of the Time of King Charles.

"So your father wishes to marry you to this new Court star!" cried Miss Betty Mance, to her cousin, the Lady Susan Whitley. "You must tell me all about it, cousin."

The Lady Susan frowned slightly.

"Sir Reginald Moscombe met our King during a hunt in the northern country, and King Charles took a liking to him and invited him to Court. He has won praise on all hands since he has been in the capital, and my father thinks he would be a good match. The King let fall some words to this effect while speaking to my father. I have, so far, run counter to the wishes of my respected parent, by declining the suitors he has put forward, and I doubt me that this time it will be the same!"

"You have the reputation of being——" began Miss Betty; but a little cough seized her very conveniently, and instead of adding "a coquette," she substituted, "hard to please."

"I should like to have speech with this Sir Reginald without his knowing that 'twas I," observed the Lady Susan thoughtfully. "A mere whim, perhaps, but one that I would fain gratify! Is it a possibility, cousin? You are ever ready with suggestions."

Miss Betty Mance, thus flattered, assumed a thoughtful expression.

"I have it!" she cried, after a pause. "You are going to the Duchess' masked ball at the Gardens, and 'tis certain that he will be there. Contrive that he shall wear a bow that you will recognise, and let it be known to him that you will be dressed in certain fashion, and will wear a rose near the left shoulder. Then get someone to dress like you; that someone will wear the rose, but you will have the same dress and no rose. 'Twill be easy for you to have speech of him; he may think that you have forgotten the rose or have taken it off, and you can arrange with your double to hand the rose to you during the evening if you find that he is agreeable, this Sir Reginald, and you desire more of his society."

"Yes!" exclaimed Lady Susan, pleased with the suggestion. "Your plan lacks detail, but I can arrange that. But who is to play the double? You are not going to the ball, and others are either not near enough to my build, or might decline the exchange of parts and seek to captivate him for themselves."

"Would that much matter?" inquired Miss Betty demurely, although inwardly she was vastly amused at this unexpected turn. It would be amusing to see the coquette caught or worsted by another woman!

"Send your new serving maid, Sophie," suggested her cousin.

"Sophie is a jade who requires to be humbled!" declared the Lady Susan spitefully. "She might try the effect of her child's face on him, though, as she must have done on Lord Cathcart when he called to see me, or he would not have attempted to kiss her."

"I thought that Sophie resisted, and struck him for what she called his insolence. A fine word to address to your betters, I must say!" said Miss Betty. "It shows that her present position has not brought her to a proper and respectful frame of mind."

"Her resistance was feigned!" said the Lady Susan decisively, and with a malicious ring in her voice. "Feigned because I saw the little play! Yet I like the notion of sending her! She could act the part well, for she was a somebody before her father's estates were confiscated and he had to flee the country! It would serve to humble her—to be among the gentlefolks as she once was in the north, and yet to remember that she is but a servant. I'll do it!"

As Miss Betty Mance quitted her uncle's mansion she felt just a touch of pity for Sophie Carlton. She knew her cousin's jealous, spiteful nature, and she knew that Sophie's face was far prettier than her mistress'. Lord Cathcart had been regarded as an eligible, and the Lady Susan had favoured his suit in a lofty manner till the nobleman, struck by the charm and beauty of the maid's face, had forgotten his dignity and honour and had endeavoured to kiss Sophie. The Lady Susan could have pardoned a step from the right path such as the kissing of a maid, for the times were not so decorous then, but she could not forgive either him or Sophie for the superior beauty of the maid. She dismissed Lord Cathcart, but she retained Sophie in her service that she might make her punishment more lasting.

The Lady Susan sat for a time in silence developing the plan. Sophie would not allow her face to be seen—that was a great relief, so that Sir Reginald, if he were inclined to be led away, would not have the temptation. Finally she summoned her maid.

Sophie Carlton entered demurely. Her sweet countenance wore a somewhat sad expression and the rosy lips were compressed. Yet it was a face that could be full of vivacity under happier conditions; the eyes could be sympathetically soft or could blaze with anger. There was a grace about her movements that attracted one's attention immediately. The Lady Susan's face grew hard as she looked at the girl; there was only three years difference in their ages, yet Sophie was so fresh of complexion compared with her mistress that the latter had to stifle the thought that arose in her mind—Sophie was the superior of the two!

Briefly, and in a tone of command, the Lady Susan told the girl what she desired to have done, giving all details save the name of the man, who would, in all probability, address her as Lady Susan Whitley. All that Sophie was permitted to know was that he was a Court favourite.

"You will answer him very briefly, so that you do not betray yourself, and you will watch me for the signal to leave. Your part will be a short one, for he will come to me on missing you; and I can have speech with him while he is trying to discover whether I am the Lady Susan and have lost my rose. And if he does not please me, I can pretend—— Yes, that will do!"

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Sophie Carlton demurred to taking part in the scheme; but her faint protest raised such a storm that she decided to yield.

Once outside the apartment, she burst into tears.

"Why is Fate so cruel to me that my father is unjustly suspected of treason, and I am reduced to the necessity of serving this woman as a maid?" she sobbed. "She is continually subjecting me to indignities; and yet, if I leave her, who will take me? To save myself from starvation I should see myself compelled to marry some rough, vulgar retainer. Oh, no! I must bear it yet awhile, and perhaps justice will come!"

She dried her eyes and went about her work. After all, she would be doing no harm by acting as her mistress' double, and that was no worse, regarded as work, than she had to do every day!

The night of the masked ball arrived and the Gardens were filled with a gay crowd of men and women, all intent on enjoyment. The King was there, it was whispered, and a certain figure was pointed out as that of the ruler called the Merry Monarch, but who was, in more private life, a somewhat sad man. Sophie was set down at the Gardens by one of the family coaches and conducted into the Gardens by Lord Whitley, who had reluctantly agreed to his daughter's proposition. The Lady Susan was to arrive later.

Sophie Carlton felt strangely out of place, and shrank from the remarks addressed to her by certain revellers; but she mustered her courage on Lord Whitley's leaving her, and walked straight to the spot where, she understood, the unknown gallant would be found. She thought she espied him, and then she pretended to be going in another direction, according to instructions. She was trembling with suppressed agitation, and nearly uttered a nervous cry when a hand was placed on her arm.

"May I have the honour and pleasure of escorting the Lady Susan Whitley through the Gardens and claiming a dance with her?" asked the unknown in a melodious voice.

Sophie started, and her head seemed to swim. Her tongue clung to the roof of her mouth, and she could not speak. That voice! She had just sufficient presence of mind to bow, and the stranger offered his arm. Sophie was glad of the support.

The young baronet was somewhat at a loss to account for the silence of Lady Susan. He had heard so much about her that he was prepared for a different reception. He had not wished to accept the honour of being the companion of this young Court dame, but he had been persuaded into it. The King had thrown out a hint, and he should act upon it.

"It is an honour to be so favoured!" he remarked gallantly. He said it tamely; he felt that he was not accustomed to make use of Court flattery; and, moreover, he feared that the Lady Susan would compare him with others, to his disadvantage. "Would you rather join the gay throng?"

"No, no! I would rather keep away from them!" the girl cried hurriedly. "Oh, what have I done?" she murmured inaudibly. "I have betrayed myself!"

At the sound of her voice, altered as it was by agitation, Sir Reginald Moscombe started and stopped short in his walk. Grasping her tightly by the arm, he stood directly in front of her, his eyes fixed on her mask as though he would try to see beneath it.

"Who is it? The voice is that of the woman I have been seeking for months!" he declared, his breath coming quick and fast with excitement. "It is not the Lady Susan Whitley. Sophie, it is you!"

No answer. The masked face near his own was turned downwards, as if to avoid his ardent gaze.

"Come with me!" His voice was slightly hoarse with emotion. "Come into the shadow!"

She could not resist. He took her to a secluded spot within a clump of trees, lighted by the full moon which was shining gloriously above them.

"Sophie, I have found you! Remove your mask and let me gaze on your sweet face once more. See!" He removed his own mask, revealing his handsome features. "It is I—Reginald!"

(*Continued on next page.*)

When Should a Woman do Her Shopping?

Should a woman do her shopping, in the morning, during the afternoon, or should it be delayed till the lamps are lighted, and the evening shadows have merged into the blackness of night? Sometimes the latter course is the only one available on account of illness; but Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness will save women this inconvenience, because they have the power to restore you to health, as they did Mrs. M. A. Jones, of 35 Trafford Street, Hulme.

"My weakness after an attack of influenza," she said to a Manchester Chronicle reporter, "was inconceivable, being increased, no doubt, by my years. I had little appetite for anything. I tried all sorts of nourishment, but I made no progress. I was compelled to move about with the greatest care lest faintness overtook me as a result of the exhaustion. My knees were weak, and I felt perfectly miserable. I suffered terribly from sleeplessness, and with such a succession of weary, restless nights, there was a very remote chance of my strength returning. Many days I was so done up that I could not stir out to do my shopping till eventide. My case seemed hopeless. Being a member of the Radnor Street Wesleyan Chapel, I had a large number of friends coming to see me, and they together with the pastor, gave me up and said I should not pull through.

"I remained in that pitiable plight until I heard of Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness. I went in for a course. The result was amazing! First of all, I began to get more sleep, and on a morning awoke thoroughly refreshed. Throughout the day I did not experience any more of that tired, weary feeling I used to have, and ever since I have been a stranger to it. The weakness left my knees, and instead of hobbling about, I was soon able to move with comfort. In fact, after a little while, I was quite cured. Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness are unequalled for sleeplessness, debility, indigestion, headache, dizziness, constipation, piles, liver and kidney troubles, anæmia, female ailments, colds, chills, rheumatism, and as a preventative of influenza. All chemists sell Bile Beans, or they may be obtained post free from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co, 119 and 120 London Wall, London, E.C., for prices one and three-halfpence, or two and nine.

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EXTRA CREAM TOFFEE

TURN AT ONCE TO THE SERIAL COMPETITION ON PAGE 527 AND WIN A GRAMOPHONE.

Her head drooped, and she made no effort to take off the mask. With deft fingers he performed the task for her, and raised her downcast face to his.

"It is my own Sophie!" he cried rapturously. "Found at last!" He kissed the rosy lips passionately. "What, tears? Tears of joy, I doubt not! But why have you hidden your sweet face from me for all these months?"

She was in his arms, and, unmindful of the fact that others might approach, she yielded to her emotions and allowed him to strain her to his breast and kiss her again and again.

"Dry those tears, my sweet Sophie, and tell me how it is that you fled from me and why I find you here in the character of the Lady Susan Whitley. There is some mystery which you must explain. We must assume our masks once more and move among the throng. There is to be a dance and we will dance together again as we did in the old home!"

"When my father was unjustly accused, all his friends seem to have thought him guilty and turned coldly from me. His estates confiscated, where could I go? You were away, and I feared that you would share the general opinion. Your prolonged absence confirmed my fear. Even if you held a different opinion, you would not care to marry the daughter of a supposed traitor, lest you were condemned as an accomplice. So I fled to London—oh, the horror of the journey!—and I entered the service of the Lady Susan Whitley as a—as a serving maid!"

They were just leaving the shadow of the trees, but Sir Reginald caught her in his arms compassionately and kissed her.

Encouraged by his sympathy, she told him of her life with the Lady Susan, the indignities she had to bear, and the command of her mistress that she should impersonate the Lady Susan. And then a touch of jealousy seized her.

"I did not know 'twas you whom I had to meet," she said, with a strange quiver. "I fear that I am not to be compared with the Lady Susan, and that I have spoilt your pleasure, for you are——"

"Sophie!" The tone was so full of reproach that she cried for forgiveness at once. "I came against my will, because they said that the King had hinted something," he continued. "I have sought you since my return to England, but could find no clue. I took the opportunity to come to London, because it was rumoured that you had come to this great city, but I could not find you. I have taken advantage of a show of favour from the King to plead for your father, and, I hope, with some chance of success. Thus have I shown my love for you. Do you doubt me?"

"Oh, no! Forgive me! I was so miserable, I have been so unhappy!"

He stopped as though he would embrace her again, but they were now in full view and he was forced to renounce the intention.

"Let us have a dance. See, they are forming couples on the platform!" he cried, hurrying her forward.

They passed close to a group of men and women, and one of the latter touched Sophie as she passed and uttered the injunction "Leave!" It was the Lady Susan.

"I cannot dance with you, Reginald!" said Sophie anxiously. "The Lady Susan has just whispered that I must leave!"

"I noticed a figure dressed like yourself," said the baronet calmly. "Well, she must wait! She played a trick on me and also on you, and now we will repay her! Yet we ought to be grateful, for by her plotting she has brought us together! Come, the dance is beginning! Forget the past and be happy—with me!"

"You will fall into disgrace if you are known to dance with me, a traitor's daughter!" faltered Sophie.

"Tut, tut! Does love care for that? I will marry you whatever befall!"

He swung her along, and in a moment they were whirling round in the midst of the dancers to the strains of a fashionable dance of the period. Sophie forgot all her misery in the delights of that dance with her lover, and both the young people were oblivious of the malignant glances cast at them by the Lady Susan, who was beside herself with rage at the disobedience of her maid.

"May I claim the honour of the next dance with the Lady Susan Whitley?" asked a voice by her side.

"Mr. Downes!" she exclaimed. "How fortunate that you recognised me and that you are here! Betty has told you about it? You can help me?"

"I am at your service!" was the reply.

"I wish to separate those two, you know whom I mean! Take me to them when the dance is finished and engage her!"

"You might think it a pity to part them if you had seen and heard what I saw and heard yonder!" he asserted, with a malicious twinkle in his eyes which she could not see.

He related to the Lady Susan some portion of the scene within the clump of trees, and his companion was furious.

"I knew not that she was the daughter of a traitor!" she cried. "These small plots do not always come to our knowledge when they are hatched in the provinces; they are kept secret for reasons of State. Now, you must help me!" she continued imperiously. "She will soon go to my carriage in order to return. You must arrange that she be carried off and sent away. Keep her anywhere out of his reach and marry her, if it please you, to some varlet. As for him, we will upset him! He will be accused of conspiring through her with her father, and her disappearance will confirm the suspicion. That will be the end of his career as a Court favourite!"

"The plan falls in with my views," observed Mr. Downes, "provided that *I* reap some benefit! I do not see any provision for my benefit in your scheme yet, my lady!"

"I will ask my father to help you, if you require some mark of favour!"

"Good!" he responded. "A knighthood! Betty longs for a title, and she may e'en marry another if I do but get one. It is a bargain!"

At the conclusion of the dance, however, the plotters missed their prey. They sought the lovers for some minutes before making their way to the entrance. Lady Susan had an idea that Sophie would get Reginald to conduct her to the Lady Susan's carriage. Mr. Downes ascertained that the Whitley carriage was still waiting and returned to tell the Lady Susan this important fact.

He had left her with some others who had made themselves known, and on returning he found her with the man whom he knew to be Sir Reginald Moscombe.

"I fear that someone has been playing a sorry joke on you, Sir Reginald, during the past hour!" she declared, "and you have been attentive to an impostor." She spoke sweetly, and Downes understood that she had given up the original plan of having a chat with Sir Reginald without his being aware of her identity.

"She is bent on her plot!" muttered Downes. "She can be a demon if she likes, and I should not like to fall into her clutches. I doubt me if it is safe to aid her, and yet the knighthood is worth a little risk!" Approaching her, he contrived to whisper in her ear that Sophie had not yet left the Gardens.

"Watch for her!" was the whispered reply, while Sir Reginald was looking aside. "Don't fail me!"

Downes returned to the entrance and requisitioned the services of four men on whom he could rely. The coachman knew him and was prepared to do his bidding. Then he waited for the figure to appear.

The coach had been sent a short distance away, so that the would-be rider would have to look for it. It was an hour later before Downes observed the masked figure emerge and look about; she wore no rose, and he chuckled.

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A Famous Specialist on the Permanent Cure of Obesity.

Just as the name of some great physician or surgeon springs to the mind when some particular disease or class of disease is mentioned, so when the word "Corpulency" is uttered, the name of Mr. F. Cecil Russell comes to mind on the instant. Not that that well-known authority looks upon obesity as a disease, however; but his name, as that of the most successful of specialists in the treatment of obesity, is inseparately connected with that branch of the curative art.

If any of our stout readers wish to know what Mr. Russell has accomplished in this direction, and by what particular methods, let that reader at once write him at Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C. (enclosing three penny stamps), for a copy of the nineteenth edition of his standard work, entitled "Corpulency and the Cure," an admirably lucid treatise of 256 pages. Our reader's effort in making the application will be amply rewarded.

"Corpulency and the Cure"* goes at once to the root of the matter and tells all about the various causes of obesity. It then deals *in extenso* with its cure, and explains the radical differences between the "Russell" treatment and the many other treatments, British and Continental, which have met with but partial success where they have not failed altogether. As an indisputable proof of the harmlessness of the treatment, Mr. Russell publishes the receipt of the liquid vegetable compound upon which he chiefly relies as a reductive agent. By this, also, it will be seen that the purely herbal ingredients of the mixture are quite innocuous. By Mr. Russell's method it is clearly proved that a person, however stout, may regain normal dimensions and weight with ease and safety, and without any racking and exhausting purgatives or any needlessly severe exercise. Only a little prudence and care is required, and the decrease of fat goes on naturally but perceptibly at the rate of from ½lb. to 2lb. daily until the desired condition is reached, when the treatment may be set aside with no fear of a recurrence of obesity if only ordinary hygienic rules are observed. This most important feature of the treatment stands out very prominently in the hundreds of extracts from patients' letters which the author has thought fit to incorporate in his book. Moreover, whenever the matter of general health is mentioned the patient is usually enthusiastic. The truth is that the "Russell" treatment—or rather the principal compound employed—is a splendid tonic, improving appetite and aiding the organs of digestion and assimilation, so that a larger amount of wholesome food is required and taken and new muscular tissue is formed in place of the unhealthy adipose which is being steadily destroyed and eliminated. However looked upon, the system is sound and admirable, and "Corpulency and the Cure," with its mass of well-arranged facts and figures must of necessity appeal to any reader possessing the logical faculty.

** A Copy of "Corpulency and the Cure" will be sent under plain sealed envelope to readers of "Short Stories," who will forward their address, with three penny stamps, to the Author,*

F. CECIL RUSSELL,

Woburn House, Store St., Bedford Square, London, W.C.

All correspondence regarded as strictly confidential.

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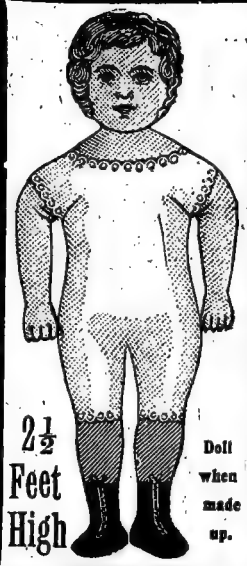

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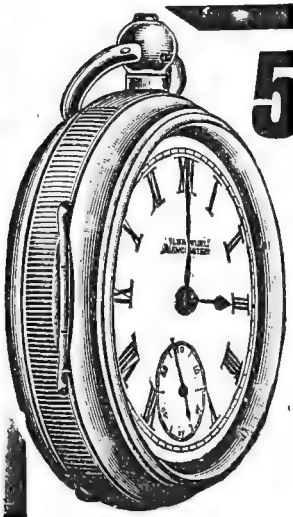

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"This way!" he said softly, "the carriage is here, ready."

She entered the coach, Downes made signs to the coachman and his four rascals, and the coach was driven off at a great speed.

On the following morning there was a great to-do, for both the Lady Susan and her maid were missing. Lord Whitley made all investigations that were possible, and gradually he learnt part of the truth.

Downes furnished the first clue by telling how he had caused the maid to be carried off by the Lady Susan's orders. He was unable to trace her ladyship on returning to the gardens.

Then the coachman came home without the coach, and told his story. He thought he was helping to abduct a maid, but before he had gone far he heard his mistress' voice, calling to him to stop.

He tried to pull up, but the four men knocked him about and left him by the roadside while they went off with the coach and the lady. They knew what they had to do, they told him.

Downes' consternation may be imagined. By some mischance, the Lady Susan had been abducted instead of the maid!

Luckily the abducted woman was to be taken to a certain spot and kept there until he arrived, so he and Lord Whitley went off at once and rescued the Lady Susan from her plight.

She had been preoccupied on leaving the Gardens, and, thinking that Downes had had Sophie carried off and had brought another coach for her, as arranged, had entered the vehicle quite unsuspectingly and had become a victim to her own plot.

And what had become of Sophie?

Her lover had insisted on sending her to the house of one of his friends in London, where she would be treated as a lady and have the companionship of his daughters till Reginald could marry her.

He had taken her straight to a coach after that dance, and had seen that she was in safe hands. It was after he re-entered the Gardens, alone, that he had met the Lady Susan and had resolved to play with her as she had played with him. She was so mortified, however, at what Downes had told her, that she was in no mood for the festivities or for further companionship with Sir Reginald, and stayed only long enough (as she thought) to enable Downes to carry out the latest plot.

The rage and mortification of the Lady Susan were equalled only by the joy experienced by the lovers at being reunited after their separation for so many months. Their joy was increased by the knowledge that the King, in an interview for which Reginald had boldly asked, had expressed his suspicions that Sophie's father was not the real culprit in connection with the attempt against his life in the north, but that the blame had been thrown on him by the guilty parties in a very skilful manner.

"I am not sure who the criminals are," the King had said, "but I will grant your request that Carlton may be pardoned and have his estates restored to him. So you intend to marry his daughter, anyhow? You are over-bold, methinks, but yet I like a bold man and I will send you a gift for the bride on her wedding day. But that must not be till her father returns, eh?"

With characteristic generosity, the King issued the pardon at once, and he was present at the marriage ceremony, a month later.

While Sophie was being led to the altar by the man she loved, thus realising the height of her happiness, the Lady Susan was living in retirement to avoid the laughter and scoffing of those who had learnt of the failure of her precious schemes.

She is now extremely careful never to engage a maid who could for one moment be called either a beauty or a lady.

George Day.

"WILL you be mine, Miss Bullion?" asked George. "No, George. I don't want to be anybody's mine," replied the lady, with a rich, wary smile. And then George called a meeting of his creditors and effected a compromise for sixpence in the pound.

JACK: "Maud wants to know why you shun her company now." Tom: "Well, the fact is, I'm hard up." Jack: "I'll tell her, and you needn't shun her any more." Tom (brightening up): "By Jove, do you think so?" Jack: "Yes. She'll shun you."

MAUD: "How do you like that young Mr. Peduncle?" Irene: "I don't like him at all. He's either very stupid or he's an impudent upstart. I said to him at the party last night that I didn't feel like eating anything, and he said: 'Why, Miss Squires, you certainly look well enough to eat.'" "Well, what of that?" "Why, he should have said I looked good enough to eat."

LITTLE JIMMY visited his father's office, and after examining the typewriting machine, observed to his mother: "What do they take those to the theatre for?" "My boy," replied his mother, "they do not take them to the theatre." "Well, it's mighty funny then. Pa was telling that gentleman he took his typewriter to the thea——" "James," said his father sternly, "I will see you in the stable after we get home."

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

Advice Misinterpreted.

In a recent issue I said "I have heard of cases when a wife, exasperated by neglect on the part of her husband, has left him altogether to go and live with relatives." A correspondent, who does not appear to be blessed with an over-supply of good manners, especially in writing to those with whom he is unacquainted, interprets this as advising a wife to desert her husband. Having uttered this tremendous piece of misinterpretation, he is good enough to refer to my advice as a danger, and also trash. Myself he designates as a "type of conceited womanhood."

* * * * *

Thank you, my amiable friend, I am very sorry to have thus incurred your displeasure. However, I can only say that I am constantly receiving letters from my clients themselves in which I hear that the advice given has put an end to the troubles, and as those principally concerned seem to be satisfied, I do not know that the opinion of even an abusive third party is of very much value. As to "conceited womanhood," perhaps my readers will not regard it as a greater evil than ill-mannered manhood, which, when unable to agree with the opinions of others, has recourse to abuse. As to your point itself, nobody of average intelligence could possibly interpret my remarks on the occasion in question as "advice to a wife to desert her husband." Anyone who has even carelessly glanced at this page in the past will know that such advice would be quite foreign to the principles on which I deal with questions submitted to me.

❦❦❦

A Changed Lover.

"Agatha" is engaged to Leonard, who is twenty-two years of age. Until six months ago there appeared to be no obstacle to their marriage. Then he was sent abroad for six months, and has travelled a great deal. She now notices a change in his manner. He no longer seems to look on her as the one thing in life, but has developed a love for all sorts of pleasures never before apparent in him, and which she could not share. To put it bluntly, he shows signs of wishing to back out of the engagement, though, of course, by mutual consent.

* * * *

I think I should give Leonard a rest for a while. People who have just completed a trip abroad do very often develop all sorts of odd fancies, which, however, seldom last. Leonard is evidently going through a phase common to most young men of his age. If he really devotedly loved you before, be assured his change is only imaginary. He will come back to you. Meanwhile, let him go his way, and bide the time of his return. It is no use forcing a man to remain entangled, if the desire on his part has for the time being departed.

❦❦❦

How to Talk to a Man.

What should a woman talk about to a man when she meets him out? "Margaret" does not know. Quite often young men call on her people, and sometimes they have not very much to say for themselves. Perhaps, thinks "Margaret," they are a trifle nervous in her society. How can she bring them out?

* * * *

Talk to a man about his own work, pleasures, hobbies, books, and such things. Every young man likes to think that his life is of some interest to a girl. When you have found out what most interests him, talk on that subject as often as you can. In this way men get sooner or later to discover what good and sensible friends girls make in times of trouble, and the reflection sometimes develops to such an extent that proposals of marriage may result. For a man who is doubtful about his relations with the opposite sex, a girl cannot use better means of satisfying him than by proving herself to be interested in his life and able to help him in the event of trouble.

❦❦❦

The Summer Girl.

"Theo" met a girl at the seaside last summer, and was very attentive to her. They went to picnics and so on, and he thought she really had taken a great fancy to him. Now he has met her in town, and finds that she appears to care very little for him, in fact, she is not the same girl. He professes to be very fond of her, but would like to see some return on her part.

* * * *

Perhaps she is a girl who likes a man in summer but not at other times. You know that kind of flirt. On a holiday, girls will make themselves very agreeable to the young man who can take them for picnics, drives, and other enjoyable excursions, but when brought face to face with them under the dull surroundings of town life, may alter their minds. "Theo" had better give the matter three months' trial, and if after that time, he finds she shows no signs of reviving their summer intimacy, he had better come to the conclusion that she is a "summer girl" simply, and has no use for a man under the ordinary routine of life. Such a girl, of course, is not to be considered seriously as a future wife, as in married life it is the humdrum which really tests affection.

❦❦❦

How to Start a Courtship.

How should a man start a courtship? "A.S." is about to make his first experiment, and asks me for a few general hints. He has met a girl who attracts him, but of course cannot yet say he is in love with her, as that can only be proved by subsequent meetings. He wants, however, to get on to fairly intimate terms with her, and beyond the ordinary commonplace relationship, so as to make up his mind. What help can I give him in making the first overtures?

* * * *

Well, "A.S.," a woman is generally won over and prejudiced in a man's favour by a compliment. Don't tell her right away she is the most beautiful woman you have ever seen, and so on, as that only embarrasses her. Congratulate her on simpler things, such as the way she plays the piano, or her good taste in wearing hats, or selecting patterns for dresses. Anyhow, show yourself appreciative of some trait of her character. This softens her, and inclines her to hear more from you—provided the flattery is judiciously given. When you have thus softened your relationship, talk as friend to friend, and you will soon discover whether or not you are in love with her. Love, in fact, generally discovers itself, and if, after a while, it does not in your case, let the affair pass and do not bother your head about it any more.

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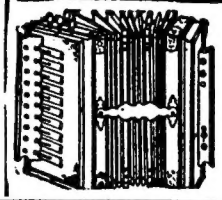

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